

could you be the one to call

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could you be the one to call

by [WinchesterBurger](#)

Summary

“You wanted to shoot me in the head.”

“I know and I’m sorry, kid.”

“Exactly, *kid*. *I’m in fucking high school and you wanted to shoot me in the head.*”

[AU where Quentin fakes his death, shows up on Peter's doorstep and the recording of his last moments doesn't exist.]

Notes

Translation into Russian by lovely Taracsacum (previously Bucky_without_plums) available!

This ship needs more fluff, come on guys! Let's give our boys some happiness! I just. I love Jake Gyllenhaal and I love my princess who loves fluff, so here I am. I had this idea ever since I started watching FFH and just couldn't let it go to waste. Let's hope I have enough strong will to finish this! (Well, it did look better in my Google Docs, sorry.)

The title is from "Lose Control" by Meduza, Becky Hill and Goodboys, because it reminds me strongly of Beck.

Also, I'll probably make some playlist for this thing with my girlfriend, so stay put.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

prologue

To be honest, everything was going quite good after the whole Mysterio business.

Nick Fury wasn't even that mad at him – not that Peter dared to meet him face to face, oh no, but still – and wasn't threatening to take E.D.I.T.H. anymore, which was a real achievement. Actually, he seemed suspiciously cool with all the bullshit that was Peter's doing and what was indeed more dubious was the fact that he decided to leave the boy in peace so quickly. Peter Tingle (oh *gosh* , not *this*) screamed inside him, but Peter had no idea what the fuck was going on. Not that this was new.

Aunt May and Happy, on the other hand... Well, there was so much to unpack here. Firstly, Peter didn't know *how* and *when* they had started dating, because they were both such equally reasonable adults who refused to explain literally *any* aspect of their lives. Secondly, now they were both so clingy that Peter was ready to pay any amount of money he didn't have to just get a rest from them.

And last but not the least, May looked so joyful for the first time since uncle Ben and truly Peter couldn't feel even one iota of annoyance at their happiness.

When it came to Ned and Betty, they insisted that they weren't meant to be together and that they were fine being friends, but Peter knew better. They still rotated around each other like a planet and its satellite, sitting next to each other during the breaks and catching the other's gaze across the room. Really, it couldn't have been more dramatic with their stubbornness, yet Peter found it somewhat sweet. Okay, they were sweet with their overaffection and tender gestures and he kind of shipped it.

In fact, he shipped it a lot. Shamelessly.

About MJ though... They didn't work out the way he had thought they would. After the awkward kiss on the bridge and the whole lot of hand holding during the flight and departure, there was something that clicked just a little bit off between them at school. There was a load of flirting along the way and shy glances and occasional hand holding, but Peter discovered that he no longer had the desire to kiss the girl to unconsciousness and stopped to daydream about her. He felt awfully bad for this at first, however soon he noticed the same amount of doubt in MJ's behaviour and then she noticed in his, and somehow it made sense to just keep holding hands and hug, but never kiss again. To Peter's astonishment, he felt nice having someone for casual touches.

The one and only thing that was altered for worse were his nightmares. He had had them before, of course, he had a lot of sleepless nights filled with grief after the Blip, all of them involving Tony dying in various ways – more often bloody than not – but after the encounter with Mysterio and his too realistic illusions created with the help of E.D.I.T.H. Peter almost couldn't sleep. He couldn't fall asleep and then he couldn't stay that way, which evolved into nights spent outside, in his Spider-Man suit and with eyes fixated on the stars. Slowly, he was getting convinced that sleep wasn't just his privilege anymore.

The only thing that seemed to not change were Queens alone. There was the same buzz of city life, the same patterns of lights flickering during the lively nights and the same rush of people hurrying through the busy streets. Peter missed swinging between the blocks of flats and the shiny skyscrapers, petting a dog here and stopping to crouch down on a roof there. This was his home and he finally was where he belonged.

Today was a usual day, a Wednesday, two weeks after the Europe trip and two weeks since he last fought with anything more serious than a handful of shoplifters. Peter was tired as always, but not exhausted yet when he came home from school to the empty flat. He weakly recalled that tonight May was having a date with Happy in a cinema or something and that he was ordered to not wait for her arrival. Their dates were slowly turning into May sleeping most of the days at Happy's, wherever this was, and Peter felt more and more like he was living alone. Not that he complained. It was actually better that she didn't have to listen to his screams and sobs when he woke up again and again and again during the night. He was awful at stifling his crying.

The dinner was waiting for him in the oven, carefully covered with a sheet of foil, and when Peter peeked into the dish, he was met with a delicious scent of a fresh homemade lasagna. Oh, how he loved Aunt May's cooking. He was so thankful that she wasn't too caught up in her new relationship to forget about him. It would end in him eating instant soups for every meal, every day, and that probably wasn't the best thing for his still growing, mutated body.

Peter heated the food up, put a large piece of it onto a plate and poured himself a glass of orange juice, then moving to the living room. He needed a rest; a long relaxing week off when he could just sleep and sleep until his body wouldn't take another minute of unconsciousness, yet all he got to do was to put his feet on the coffee table and switch the TV on. He hated the news, but he still watched them nearly every day, checking for any signs of potential threats or any Avenger coming back to the game.

Checking for any signs of Tony Stark, although he knew that none were coming up.

The journalist of the station Peter happened to be watching now was halfway through announcing some kind of a new law soon to be passed when the doorbell rang, echoing in the tranquil flat. The boy sighed as the sound repeated itself, this time longer, and reluctantly slid off the couch. He wasn't expecting any guests – it wasn't like Ned had any time for him now, too preoccupied with Betty, and MJ was doing something with that girl from the fifth period tonight – and when he made a beeline to the front door, he realized that Aunt May also hadn't left him any info of a package coming or anything.

And Peter really didn't want to deal with a salesman of any kind right now. He was just *tired* and all he asked the universe for was a five-minute break. It couldn't be so hard.

His entire body felt like tingling the moment he caught the doorknob. It was sudden and weird, and he frowned at his hand. There were no sounds coming from the other side of the door, no strange smells and literally nothing to be afraid of, but his Peter Tingle (just *stop*) was never, never wrong. It saved his life in London – he couldn't *not* trust it with his whole being. He tensed up, readying his body to fight-or-flight response and pressed the doorknob, opening the door slowly.

He almost tore it from its hinges and threw it at the figure standing right in front of him.

"Hi, Peter," Quentin Beck said and smiled weakly, wincing instantly.

The rage bubbling beneath the surface of his skin made Peter see red, but all that came out of his mouth was a dangerously composed whisper.

"You son of a bitch."

truth be told

Chapter Notes

Okay, even I am surprised at how many words I am able to write in one day. Wow.
I'd be very happy to see your opinions in the comments, guys. I'm open for suggestions
:)

Title from "Gives you hell" by The All-American Rejects

“You didn’t expect to see me again, I know, no need to say that,” Quentin added, his smile dropping at the sight of raw ire in Peter’s brown eyes. The man avoided his gaze as best as he could and bent a little instinctively, impressed by the sheer power of the boy’s stance.

And Peter was close to exploding.

“How the fuck are you not dead?” It was the first thing to come into his mind, because yeah, he felt a bit of disappointment at the fact that *the* famous Mysterio was still alive and breathing.

“I can do some illusions on my own, you know. Don’t need E.D.I.T.H. for that,” Quentin replied, shifting his weight onto the other foot and wincing again. Only now Peter took a better look at him and noticed the way his left hand curled around his stomach, his hand resting in the exact spot the bullet wound from their last encounter should be.

“And this is the reason you come here?” He asked coldly, truly surprised how flat his voice sounded. Beck glanced up at him for a second and then dropped his gaze to the floor. His face was covered with a too long beard, bags under his eyes as visible as Peter’s and his entire outfit looking like he had stolen it from a homeless. He looked like shit, not even close to the Quentin Beck Peter met just a couple of weeks ago.

“Kinda,” he murmured nearly coily. His eyes snapped up at once, connecting with Peter’s, and the boy was shocked to see them filled with remorse. He almost, *almost* believed him, but now he knew better. Quentin Beck was nothing more than a pathetic clown and Peter had had enough of his games.

“Peter, listen – I’m sorry, okay? I’m really sorry for what I’ve done and I regret it.”

“You wanted to shoot me in the head.”

“I know and I’m sorry, kid.”

“Exactly, *kid*. I’m in fucking *high school* and you wanted to shoot me in the head.”

“I *know*, okay? I know what I wanted and I’m s—”

“Then get the fuck out of here.”

“W-what?”

The look of complete surprise painted on Beck’s face was enough for Peter to tense up even

further.

“Get the fuck out of my life. I said my goodbyes to your cold dead body two weeks ago and that was the end of Quentin Beck in my life. Go back to your Earth.”

He swung the door to shut them, but Beck’s voice stopped him dead in tracks.

“There is no *my* Earth. I’m not from an alternative universe. I’m just a random guy from California,” his voice was quiet and hollow, and this time a lot more believable. But still, Peter had no desire to fall for his tricks again. “I worked for Tony Stark and invented a holographic project which he later stole from me and renamed BARF. I left the same day and from this moment planned my revenge that the Blip took away from me. When I came back, Iron Man was declared dead and all I could do was to try and take E.D.I.T.H. back. I didn’t want to kill you at first, just manipulate you, but then you discovered my whole plan and I had no choice.” Beck took a deep breath after his monologue which still seemed a little too plain to be true.

“No, you had a choice,” Peter replied quickly, not letting the man speak after the break, bitterness overflowing his mind and taking control of his voice. “You could just choose not to be an asshole.”

Beck looked at him with something puzzling in his eyes, hand still gripping tightly his stomach. “Believe me, it wasn’t that easy.”

“Bullshit. And how did you fool Fury and everyone else into believing that you came from another universe? Couldn’t they just this easily check your files?”

Quentin looked over his shoulder, checking the hallway to make sure it was empty and then glanced back at Peter. “Could we not talk about this here? Literally anyone can eavesdrop.”

Peter braced himself and opened the door wider hesitantly.

“Try anything and I’m sending you on the wall, and then right through the closest window.”

His face must have been serious enough and still decorated with ire, because Beck nodded slowly and dropped his gaze back down as he passed Peter on the threshold. He didn’t smell too bad, the boy noted, but still he could use a shower. The door closed behind them and the air was immediately filled with silence.

“So,” Peter sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. He definitely didn’t have enough energy to deal with what else Heavens and Gods wanted to drop on him. He heard Quentin shifting his weight again, this time onto the other foot.

“I cleared all of my files from around the world. My schools, my jobs, all my bills and tickets and streets cameras,” the man spoke again, this time much quieter, as if the shame in his voice was real. Peter really, *really* didn’t want to be fooled again. “It took me three years to wipe out my entire existence, but it wasn’t impossible.”

“All of this time and effort... just to have some revenge on one man? Why?” Peter took his hand away from his face and looked at Beck, surprised to find him staring at him with weariness in his eyes.

“I hated him with all I had; I still do. This revenge was the sense of my existence.”

“Then you wasted your entire life for something you hadn’t even achieved. Pathetic.”

The words were a hot hard blow – at first Quentin looked shocked, and then the humiliation finally got to him, making him wince and close his eyes. And Peter never felt better than now as he belatedly had a chance to chuck out everything he wanted and needed to get rid of. It felt cathartic.

“What do you want from me then?” He asked tiredly, letting his voice relax. Looking at Beck’s state, he didn’t have to pretend anymore – the man wasn’t a real threat.

Quentin frowned without opening his eyes. “I need a place to stay.”

“Oh, and I seemed like a good option?” Peter snorted bitterly and crossed his arms.

“You were the only option.”

“Just great. Do you really think I’m going to let you stay with me? Do you even know what my Aunt thinks of you? Not to mention Happy,” he added after a second of consideration. “You are *not* welcome here, Beck. I don’t care what you do and where you go; just go. Leave me alone.”

At this Quentin opened his eyes and locked them with Peter’s. They were clear and confident once again, and so, so blue.

“I’m not expecting you to like me, Peter. I know what I did and I know you hate me. I’m well-aware. But I’m still asking you for a few days. Only a few days. Let me heal and then I’ll be gone forever.”

Peter didn’t feel convinced at all. All the words spilling out of Beck’s mouth seemed like a whole new level of bullshit, and bullshit in general was the last thing he needed right now.

“You’re a grown ass man, can’t you, I dunno, find yourself a hideaway spot or something? I’m sure a *supervillain* like *you* has a lot of contacts literally everywhere.”

“I don’t have any contacts,” the man admitted, still not taking his eyes off Peter’s. “I told you, I had to wipe out my existence from the files, all of it. Contacts could have revealed my true identity and I couldn’t risk it. I have nowhere to go.”

The silence between them stretched impossibly, bit by bit becoming uncomfortable, threatening to swallow them both if they didn’t say something, *now*.

“I promise I’ll be gone soon,” Beck added after a long, long moment. “I know what my promise means to you, but believe me this one last time. You can drop me out of your window or whatever if I don’t keep my word.”

And this made Peter smile a bit, just this little upwards quirk of a corner of his lips, but it *was* there, as clear as a day, and before he reacted and squeezed his mouth back into a thin line Beck noticed it and his eyes shone slightly. They seemed gentler now, softer, the crystal blue standing out brighter against the tired layer covering his face.

Peter was too proud and too embarrassed to form any word for a moment, so he just sighed, getting rid of the warmth gathering beneath the skin on his cheeks. God, his sense of humor was so poor.

“A week and not one hour more. I’m going to call Fury if you stay longer.”

Beck nodded, a corner of his lips tugging up just a bit, but it was cut short suddenly by a wince.

“Thank you,” he answered in a quiet tone of voice again, clutching his stomach tighter and gritting his teeth with force. Peter noticed the man’s knuckles going white.

He sighed again, letting the prolonged breath to sweep against the walls of his lungs. “I guess you need help with this?”

And this is how Peter ended in the bathroom with shirtless Beck slumping against the wall as he was installed on the closed toilet seat. His wound opened the moment Quentin started to take off his T-shirt and now dark, dark blood was dripping from it, caught by a piece of cloth that Peter ordered the man to press against the bullet hole. The meat around it was raw and irritated, and Peter now understood how little care Beck gave to the damage.

“Have you at least rinsed it with alcohol or something?”

The glare that Beck gave him look at least a bit offended. “Of course I did, I’m not this stupid.”

“Well, it does *not* look like you have,” he mumbled, kneeling next to the barely conscious from pain man and swept a hand across his own face. “I’ll have to stitch it. It’s going to get a lot worse if I don’t and we don’t need you coming to hospital, do we?” He added firmly at the look of distaste on Beck’s face. The older man rolled his eyes and closed them.

“Do what you have to do.”

Peter started with rinsing the wound again with alcohol – plenty of alcohol to make sure it wouldn’t get more infected than it probably already had – and then disinfected the needle and the thread. The skin around the bullet hole was hot to the touch and Peter noted in his mind to remember to give Quentin some pills for fever if the temperature rose. He was thankful that at least the shell of the bullet was removed, because he wasn’t sure if he would be able to take it out. By now it could have grown into the meat of Beck’s abdomen.

At the first puncture Quentin reacted with a low hiss. Peter glanced up at him and saw the man frowning and gritting his teeth again, and so he started stitching as fast as he could, not particularly caring if it hurt or not. Really, Beck deserved much more pain than this and he ought to be aware of this.

Thanks to Peter’s experience with this kind of things – he had stitched himself more times than he could count – the whole procedure ended within minutes. The thread was even and held firmly, but the skin grew redder and hotter than before.

“You need pills. It will get worse when it starts healing,” he murmured, spreading a rich amount of ointment onto the closed wound. Beck only now seemed to come to his senses.

“Has it gotten infected?” He asked feverishly. Peter pulled a face at him.

“It’d be suspicious if it hasn’t after all this time being open. Just sit still and wait for me. I’m gonna fetch you a glass of water.”

Leaving Beck alone in the room seemed hazardous, but with the man being hardly awoken due to the pain and worsening fever it couldn’t lead to anything bad.

Peter poured a glass of tap water in the kitchen and came back to Beck staring at the ceiling with hazy eyes.

“Shit,” he mumbled under his breath and crouched next to him, grabbing some painkillers and other pills from the first aid kit he had used earlier. Shaking the man’s arm to draw his attention, Peter held up the glass. “Drink this after you swallow them.”

And then he poured the pills into Beck’s hand, navigating it to his mouth and making sure he swallowed them all. It felt like taking care of a two-year-old baby, Peter noted as he watched Quentin drink the water he brought him and rose to his feet to tower over him. He reached out with his hand and laid it on the man’s forehead. It was hot and sweaty, and Peter sighed. There went his plan for making Beck bathe. He was going to smell even worse.

“I need you to stand, Beck,” he announced, loud enough to be heard. Quentin moved his eyes to rest on him, focusing them to understand as much as he could.

“Why?” He mumbled with a frown. Peter rolled his eyes.

“I’m not letting you stay here. You’re going to sleep on the couch. Come on, stand up.”

He caught Beck by his arm and took some weight off of him – okay, more than some. He literally lifted him up of the seat and sneaked an arm around the man’s waist, dragging him to the living room. Quentin was slowly drifting off due to his fever and that made Peter kind of worried. He didn’t want to have a dead body in his flat, okay?

He came to a halt right in front of the couch. Pushing Beck aside to make him lean against a wall while he prepared a temporary bedding for him, Peter reached for a bundle of blankets that laid in the armchair. He spread one of them on the cushions to prevent them from absorbing the man’s sweat and made a primitive pillow with another one. It should be fine.

Placing Beck on the couch wasn’t a simple task – the man fell asleep the second he felt the blanket under his head and his limbs became even heavier.

“God, I know you have muscles, but *come on*,” Peter complained under his breath as he tucked the man’s legs under the second blanket. He was sweating profusely even without any layers on his chest, his breathing shallow and frantic, and Peter bit his bottom lip and lowered himself onto the floor. He rested his back against the armchair, watching Beck cautiously.

He’d have to make him a cold compress if the fever didn’t break during the night, and wake him up if his breathing quickened any more. He instantly started to analyse if the number of pills he had given the man was enough; what if he had given him too much and it would damage his liver and stomach, making him vomit in his sleep? What if he had given him too little and the fever would rise and rise until Beck just straight out died because of overheating?

He needed to stop. Too many questions, too little answers. He just had to wait and watch. And when the hell did he start to care if Quentin Beck died or not?

When Beck’s breath evened out enough to slow down Peter’s pulse, the boy looked at the clock hanging from the wall. Its hands showed him only half past eight, bringing a thousandth sigh out of him. It was going to be a long, long night, he decided as he stood up and made a beeline to the kitchen with the abandoned plate of his cold lasagna.

May would kill him when she saw their guest. Oh, how he could not wait for this.

round and round we go

Chapter Notes

I'm afraid I'm moving too fast with those two, but at the same time I have no idea how to slow down ヽ_(ツ)_/ (Also it's my first time writing a nightmare, bear with me please.)

Wish you all health, guys. Stay inside, stay safe!

[Here's the playlist I made with my girlfriend for this fic!](#)

Title from "Of The Night" by Bastille.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Blood, havoc, chaos.

Small rocks and sparks were falling down around Peter as he crawled across the ground, trying to escape from the sheer annihilation of Thanos' hands. He caught a glimpse of Ant-Man being crushed under the villain's fist, but he turned his head in time to avoid seeing the bloody pulp left of the superhero. The cut stretching from the left side of his abdomen to the second rib burned him alive, slowing his movements to impossibly sluggish and not for the first time he wished that he just simply died. It would have been easier.

The scenery changed a little to somewhat peaceful and tranquil. His wound disappeared, but he was faced with injured Tony, his face twisted with pain and agony.

"You should leave," Tony wheezed and Peter wanted to touch him so much, to hold his hand and bring him some peace, some relief in his last moments, yet he couldn't move.

"Tony," he whispered uselessly, feeling the first tear forming in his eye and dripping down his cheek. The older man's eyes tarnished, his face slackening and slowly disintegrating the same way that Peter did in the Blip. His head spinned as he collapsed in front of a tombstone with Tony's name carved into the hard rock.

The air was filled with green smoke once again, choking Peter and squeezing his throat, bringing cascades of tears out of him.

"If you were good enough, Tony would still be alive," Mysterio's voice echoed in his mind and Peter screamed, seeing black and white and red at the same time. He tasted metal on his tongue.

"If you weren't so dumb and worthless, he would be alive. It's your fault."

Peter was woken up by a sudden movement that occurred in the room. He snapped up from his spot in the armchair, fingers gripping tightly the armrests and looked to the side, in the direction that his

sixth sense had cued him. His muscles tensed up, sweat still wetting the back of his flannel shirt and forehead, but all he saw was Beck tossing in his sleep. The blanket was thrown down on the wooden floor, creased and abandoned, and Beck's face adorned with a thick layer of liquid. His breathing became hectic once again.

"Shit, shit, shit," Peter mumbled as he pushed himself up from the armchair. He swiped a hand across his forehead, getting rid of some of the sweat and knelt next to the couch. He reached out and checked the man's temperature. It was high again, having risen up from the stable level it reached when Peter was readying himself to sleep.

"What's going on with you, Beck?" He murmured under his breath with a frown. "You were fine just a few hours ago. What happened?"

He lifted himself up and hurried to the kitchen with a plan for making a compress. There he soaked a thick kitchen cloth in icy water, freezing his fingers off and ran back to the living room, carefully dropping the material on Beck's forehead. His insides tingled anxiously as he waited for any reaction from the man's unconscious body, his teeth unwittingly biting his lower lip.

The clock ticked five o'clock, forty minutes since Peter's brutal awakening, when Beck's temperature started to drop suddenly. His tossing stopped altogether and he ceased sweating, and Peter sighed with relief. He made a move to cover his legs with the discarded blanket, careful not to tangle them. His eyes stung from dried tears and too little sleep, and so he climbed back on the armchair, making himself comfortable once more.

Before he closed his eyes, praying for a nap, he glanced one last time at the man sleeping on his couch. His long hair was tousled, chest wet and sticky from sweat, his frown slowly loosening.

Beck was lucky that the boy had his Peter Tingle, otherwise he would suffocate from overheating. Not that he didn't deserve it, Peter decided.

Though he had to admit that his even breathing made quite an effective lullaby.

The second time he woke up, it was bright outside, the sun rising above the blocks of Queens' settlements. Peter stretched out, his legs and arms going up and aside, and he found out with surprise that he wasn't as tired as he should have been after the four or five hours of sleep he had gotten that night.

He groaned at the sound of his spine popping with each move and stood up, regarding the still fast asleep man. Beck looked peaceful, at last, his skin dry and breathing normal, and when Peter touched his forehead it was almost of average temperature.

"Finally," he mumbled, taking a look at the clock. It was twenty past six, almost the time he should be waking up to school anyway, but looking at the injured criminal laying on the couch in his living room, he really shouldn't be going out today. He reached out for his phone that laid abandoned on the lower shelf of the coffee table, searching for MJ's number in his contacts.

not coming to school today. am sick.

u sure ur only sick?

Peter rolled his eyes with a smile. MJ was always like this – always too sharp and astute, but he got used to it in the end. She often pretended to know something without really doing, and that's how she got most of people's secrets so fast; just like she'd done with him.

only sick. gonna need your notes after classes.

u better think of a good reason for me to give them to u.

He laid his phone aside, back to its spot, and checking if Beck's still asleep he marched to the kitchen. He was starving and thirsty, and so after rummaging through the cupboards he settled on scrambled eggs and some tea. Halfway through preparing his breakfast he realized that Beck should *maybe* eat something too. His organism was going to be drained after the whole night of high temperature and sweat, and Peter didn't need any more problems.

The bright side of this situation was that Beck was on Peter's mercy and too weak to try anything. It was always better than having healthy and strong Mysterio under his roof.

Having filled two plates with a solid amount of scrambled eggs and two mugs with black tea with an additional glass of water and pills, he put it all on a plastic tray and balanced it to the living room. Not caring about the noise he made, he laid it out on the coffee table and watched with satisfaction as Beck bolted up from his spot with a frightened expression on his face.

"Breakfast," he said without making eye contact. Picking up one plate he settled into the armchair again, poking the eggs with a fork.

Beck's voice was hoarse as if his throat was filled with grains of sand when he spoke. "Thanks."

In the corner of his eye Peter saw the man sitting up, blanket sliding of his legs to the side. He looked like shit again, but at least the bags under his eyes weren't so visible anymore. Guessing by the way the skin around his stitched up wound shone, it still hurt while moving and hadn't yet cooled down completely.

"Take the pills," Peter ordered after swallowing a good portion of his eggs. He looked at Quentin who had his fingers around a grey mug and who slouched on the couch as if the pain hadn't really faded. He nodded and did as he was told, washing the pills down with water.

They fell silent after that, eating and drinking in peace for the next ten or so minutes until Peter finished his food and put down the plate, staring at Beck.

"Do you have any spare clothes?" He asked, although he knew the answer well; the man came without a baggage, the only things that he had being the old khaki jacket and a pair of decent military boots. Beck shook his head.

"Then what are you going to wear, huh?"

No answer. A sigh escaped his mouth – he was going to enlarge his lungs if he kept the rate of sighing any longer.

“I’ll give you some of my old clothes, alright? Some of them are three times bigger than my size, they’ll fit. Probably.”

“Thanks.”

Ten minutes later Beck was wearing one of Peter’s forgotten T-shirts found on the bottom of his closet, the one with a colorful picture of Captain Phasma printed on it. Just as Peter had thought previously, it fit quite nicely, squeezing Beck’s arms only a bit too tightly. He could call it the man’s size.

“Tell me if the wound feels hotter or hurts more,” he said, gathering the plates and mugs from the coffee table and putting them on the tray as Beck straightened the creased fabric on his chest. “I’d have to make you a warm and salty compress for this.”

“Thank you.”

Peter was surprised to hear these words so loud and clear, and he turned on his heel to face the man. Quentin stood up awkwardly.

“I know that you don’t want me here, but you still help me a lot more than I expected. Thank you.”

Peter nodded equally stiffly, his eyes flying anywhere but to the man. “Wait until May sees you.”

And as if on call, the lock in the front door rattled and Peter instantly knew that the storm was coming. Great.

He moved to the door quickly and braced himself for the moment it opened. May’s blinding smile greeted him, her arms sneaking around his back and he already knew that her date was more than wonderful.

“Peter! It’s so good to see you! How was your evening? Why aren’t you getting ready to school?” Her cheerful voice chirped in his ear, making him wince.

“It was good, May,” he replied and found himself getting anxious again. How the hell should he tell her? “How-how was your date? Where did Happy take you?”

She walked into the flat speedily, shutting the door behind herself. Peter literally couldn’t keep up with her vigor. “*I did take him! To this Mexican restaurant we went to for your birthday, remember? Oh, he loved it there! And then we came to his place and ate a dessert he made – you hear it? He made a dessert ! And then we wat–*”

Her voice stopped abruptly when she stumbled upon the living room and Peter immediately knew he was fucked.

It was quiet for two seconds. Too quiet, for Peter’s liking.

And then Hell broke out on Earth.

May started screaming with anger – accusing Beck of attempting murder on her nephew, of hurting innocent kids and adults, and the boy would lie if he said that he didn’t feel good listening to her yelling the words he kept bubbling inside him – but then she started moving forward with hands curled in fists and, all in all, Beck was already injured and Peter didn’t think that he was ready for

another series of bruises and blood.

“May, stop!” He threw himself between his aunt and the man who just stepped back and stared at the woman with consternation in his eyes. They snapped up at Peter when the boy appeared in front of him, but with his back to Beck, catching May’s wrist. “May, stop, *please* .”

“How can I stop when there’s a *murderer* in my house?! He tried to kill you, Peter! And MJ, and Ned, and Harold!” Aunt May was literally shaking in his grip and the boy was for once thankful that he had his super strength. He focused on drawing her attention back from the man behind him.

“May, listen. He’s injured and he’s going to leave in a week, okay?”

“No, it’s not okay, Peter. Why is he even here?”

“He came here yesterday evening and passed out due to his fever. He’s not read—”

“He’s here since *yesterday* ? Sweetheart, you should have called me, I could have —”

Peter breathed out and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I’m fine, May, and I was. I would have called you, or Happy, if anything was wrong, you know it,” he said tiredly, trying to keep calm despite the fact he was running low on patience for everyone. “I managed just fine. And I really need you to accept the fact that Beck is going to live with us for the next week. And I’m not,” he added sharply at the look on her face. “I’m *not* happy with this either, but I’m not kicking him out in his state.”

She didn’t look too convinced, yet her hands loosened and when Peter freed her wrists, they dropped to her sides. Her gaze was fixated on Beck who still hadn’t moved from his spot behind Peter’s back, as if this place was the safest in the entire flat. Well, it probably was.

“Please, May,” Peter tried one more time, drawing her attention. “Just a week and you can drag him out of the door.”

It was her turn to sigh and she made sure it sounded dramatic. Huh, Parkers just were like this, Peter guessed.

“Fine,” she gritted her teeth with thunder in her eyes. “But if he hurts you—”

“You can do whatever you want to him, I’m fine with it,” he admitted and this finally brought a smile on her face. She sent Beck her last glare, turning around and heading to the kitchen.

“I’m making lunch for me and Happy, and then I’m gone,” she announced, sounding relieved to be able to distance herself from Beck, but at the same time her voice was filled with concern. Peter decided that he was going to text her from time to time to ease her worries.

It went better than he had expected, to be honest. Thank god Happy wasn’t with her, otherwise Peter would have been able to stop their joined rage. He looked over his shoulder at the still astonished man.

“Better don’t say a word while she’s still here,” he advised him and followed after his aunt.

It was going to be a fun week.

After May's leaving, Peter was left alone with the most manipulative man in the world and a handful of worries of his own. Beck settled back on the couch, leaning against it with closed eyes and Peter couldn't think of anything except bringing his school stuff with him to the living room. And so he did.

He made his own working studio on the coffee table, laying out his notebooks, books and binders, now under Beck's attentive stare.

"How's the wound?" Peter asked after a few moments when he felt the weight of awkwardness on his shoulders. Beck shrugged weakly.

"Not bad."

"Does it feel hotter?"

"Don't think so."

"Does it hurt when you're sitting?"

At that Beck nodded, making Peter frown. The man's body could be fighting the infection off quite well, he supposed, but it shouldn't hurt with Beck staying motionless.

"I'll make you a compress, alright? Just, don't move."

"Not exactly planning to."

Preparing a mixture consisting of hot water and salt took him less than five minutes. He dipped a freshly washed cloth in the bowl and squeezed out the extra amount, coming back to Beck sitting in the same position. The man's eyes followed his movements as he sat up next to him and rolled up his T-shirt to reveal the glossy wound. It was of the same temperature as the rest of Beck's body which was really good news, yet Quentin flinched slightly when the warm fabric connected with his stitches.

Peter looked up to see Beck observing the cloth intently. "It's for the infection, isn't it?"

His voice was hoarse, but calm, even quite soothing. Peter had to admit that the man had this weirdly reassuring timbre that didn't really match the entire supervillain look.

"Yeah, it's meant to relieve the skin and disinfect as much as possible with the wound closed," he replied in an equally low tone. Beck hummed in acknowledgment.

"It should do the work, right? No need to hospitalize?"

At that Peter snorted with a dose of amusement. He didn't miss the way Beck's face softened a bit at the sound, his lips curling up a little.

"It works fine for me, but you don't have Healing Factor, so I dunno. You can't go to hospital anyway," he summed up, letting a small amused smile adorn his face for longer.

Beck actually, *truly* chuckled.

“Right, I’m still at your mercy,” the man agreed, but didn’t sound like he cared about the whole situation. On the contrary – he seemed quite content. Peter pressed the cloth slightly firmer, bringing a hiss out of the other.

“Keep this close to the wound, even if it stings,” he ordered. “And it *will* sting.”

He drank in the sight of Beck frowning with displeasure of the pain (he looked like a sulking kid, to be honest), and sat back in his armchair. Only then the man glanced up at him, this timid look back on his features.

“Do you have like, a book I can read or something? Don’t wanna overstay your welcome, but I’d be grateful if you had something else apart from the walls for me to look at.”

This Beck sounded a lot different than the one Peter met in Europe a couple of weeks ago. He seemed like a whole new person, and the boy was wondering which one was his true persona. He liked this one better.

The teenager took a deep breath, leafing through his and May’s collection of books in his mind. They didn’t have anything interesting beside his science textbooks and May’s romance novels, but something suggested Peter that those two kinds weren’t particularly in Beck’s taste.

He had a box of his favourite stuff under his bed though.

“I might have a book you could like,” he admitted after a long pause. “Have you ever read anything by Andy Weir?”

Chapter End Notes

Bonus point for whoever guesses what book Quentin is going to read :D

the price of your greed

Chapter Notes

Okay, I'm somewhat proud and dissatisfied with this, but hell if it's gonna stop me from posting.

Stay inside, stay safe, guys!

Title from "Blood // Water" by grandson.

"I don't understand something," Beck said for the hundredth time that day, sliding a finger across a slightly yellowed page. "How do they hide the truth about Watney from the rest of the crew? It's hardly possible that they had their messages controlled on Hermes and I don't think that their families would want to cover up the information. It's just... It's messy."

Peter looked up from his notebook filled with columns of chemistry equations. "There's a reason it's called *science fiction*. It doesn't have to be accurate."

"It doesn't have anything in common with science. Come on, that's lazy writing!"

Peter huffed and rolled his eyes, choosing not to answer. He knew from his earlier tries that Beck couldn't acknowledge even for once that he was wrong; well, he should have expected.

They had been occupying their seats for a few hours now – nearly as long as Peter's classes lasted. He messaged Aunt May every thirty minutes or so to calm her nerves, and texted with MJ on almost every break she had, with him asking for school stuff and her complaining about Ned and Betty. She didn't share his enthusiasm when it came to those two; she was rather tired with them, but Peter couldn't blame her. They were quite infuriating, even for him sometimes, and he couldn't imagine how bad MJ must have been taking it. She was nervous and easily irritable, and there were times when she wouldn't talk to him all day. But that's how she was and she was his friend, so he had learned to accept it by now.

He straightened in his spot, stretching a little to relax his tense back. His joints popped loudly and he winced with discomfort, standing up.

"I'll make some tea."

He felt Beck's eyes on the back of his head as he trailed to the kitchen, instantly taking to preparing a mug of strong black tea. Sometimes his body demanded caffeine, but he hated the taste coffee left on his tongue (even when he put some milk in it, it was still disgusting), and so he remained true to Earl Grey that Aunt May loved more than himself. They always had two or three boxes hidden in the cupboard, just in case.

Having brewed the perfect tea his Aunt taught him, his thought drifted off to the man on his couch. Maybe it wasn't such a bad idea to make him coffee – he looked like someone addicted to caffeine as well, judging by his slightly jittery hands and grey bags under his eyes. And since they were going to spend the next few days together anyway it wouldn't hurt to be a little nice to him.

He tried to kill you, Peter, his mind supplied immediately, as if trying to prevent him from doing something stupid. You don't owe him anything.

But making coffee wasn't an act of forgiveness, right?

Beck's eyes widened to the size of plates when Peter put a cup of dark coffee right in front of him on the table without a word. Settling back in his armchair with the blue mug in his hands, he looked up to see the man openly staring at him with astonishment.

"What?" He asked, frowning. "Don't say you don't drink coffee."

"No, no, I do, actually," Beck assured him rapidly, awkwardly reaching out for the cup and bringing it to his nose. He took a deep breath, one that made his chest rise and caused Peter to frown even deeper. "I just thought that I'm never going to drink it again. On that bridge, I mean. And I didn't have a chance to buy it when running, so. Yeah."

Peter nodded with understanding, his eyes flicking to Beck's stomach. "And your wound?"

"It's better, thank you. Hurts a little, but it's better."

"Good."

An awkward silence fell over them like a thick blanket again. Peter's skin tingled, his thoughts starting to race out of blue. They hadn't talked about Beck's escape yet and it was about time they did. He wasn't going to let the truth die without knowing it.

"How did you manage to fly from England to USA? Money?"

Beck's face fell at that and his hands dropped on his lap. He clearly didn't want to talk about this.

"I had some money saved from earlier."

"You mean money you stole?"

"I didn't steal anything," the man glared at him, offended. "I've done shit, but I've never stolen anything. *I* was the one that something was stolen from."

Peter gritted his teeth. He wasn't going to argue with him about Tony again. Not this time, and not ever.

"Whatever. What about finding out where I live? That's not public information that everybody has."

"I'm good with computers. Hacking some systems isn't a big deal."

Okay, that he understood. It wasn't new to him, to be honest – after hearing either Tony or the rest of the Avengers talking about breaking in state networks and such, it wasn't a huge surprise to find out that yet another man could do this.

"Alright. So what about your crew?"

"My crew?" Beck looked at him with confusion written all over his face. Peter shrugged.

“Your crew, the people who worked for you, whatever. You couldn’t have done this entire show all by yourself. You may be a genius, but you’re not Doctor Strange.”

“Oh.” The man looked away shamefaced, his fingers drumming against the porcelain of the cup silently. He looked like he was bracing himself to answer and Peter waited patiently. He got all the time in the world.

“They were all victims of either Tony Stark or Stark Industries. All of them betrayed, having been ripped away their achievements. They were as resentful as me at the time. I found them and offered them a job. They accepted it.”

“Just like this? No questions, no hesitation?” Something was wrong and Peter knew it. Tony couldn’t have possibly hurt so many people so much they wanted to get revenge on him. It didn’t sound like the Stark he knew.

Beck shrugged with his eyes fixated on the wall, being there but at the same time being in a completely different place. Absent. “Some of them wanted to know more. They asked, I offered answers. Some were hesitant to risk their lives, but in the end they all accepted. They wanted to get their revenge no matter what.”

“But why? Why would they to dedicate their lives to something like this? Why would *you* do this?”

“Listen, Peter,” Beck looked back at him at last. There was ire in his eyes, sparks shooting up the way they did on the bridge, but now Peter knew that it all wasn’t directed at him. “Tony Stark wasn’t always the good guy you knew. He’d done shitty things to climb the ladder of fame, hurting lots and lots of people along the way. Only his closest ones were safe, like that Pepper Potts he married. The rest of us? He threw us out like useless trash once he got what he wanted from us.”

“That’s not true,” Peter replied with anger, even though something told him that it *was* . But Beck was a liar, right? So it *couldn’t* be. The man shook his head and put the cup away, leaning forward.

“It’s true and I think that deep down you know it is. You were his favourite, I have to admit it, and that’s why he was so good to you. He didn’t use you, right? Or *did* he at first? When he recruited you to fight Captain America because he didn’t have enough people? When you were *fifteen* ? Don’t tell me that’s a normal thing to do, to tell a fifteen year old kid to fight the most dangerous people on Earth.”

“I *am* one of those people! I am just like them and I was at the time.” The boy stood up, visibly trembling with rage and hatred and *God* how could Beck insult Tony so much, Tony who was his mentor, Tony who helped him with his superpowers and who were there for him when he needed him.

“The facts don’t defend him,” with that Beck also stood up, barely hiding the wince that spread across his face. “He threw you in the middle of the fight, thinking that giving you a new suit was enough. He didn’t train you, he didn’t offer you his support. He told you to *fight* and you could have *died* when you were *fifteen* !”

“ *He* taught me how to cope with my issues! *He* told me that I didn’t have to know what to do every second of my life! *He* showed me how to be a good person just like him!”

He stepped closer to Beck, having to look up because of the height difference. Beck was broader

and taller, and looked stronger, but Peter knew better. Looks *did* lie this time – the man wouldn't stand a chance without his illusions.

“He used your innocence to achieve his goals, just like he used other people's good will,” Beck replied, his voice growing quieter, but somewhat more bitter; his stare drilling into Peter's eyes. “He might have been a superhero, but he wasn't a good person. *You* are better than him, kid. The only thing he could have done for you was to be an example of who you shouldn't become.”

The punch that landed on the side of Beck's face almost made him stumble and fall back on the couch, but somehow he managed to maintain his balance. He pressed a hand to his quickly reddening cheek and moved his jaw experimentally to check if it was broken. It turned out that it wasn't and Peter immediately regretted not hitting him with more force.

“Don't you *ever* dare to speak about him like that,” he almost growled with his eyes on the man. Beck looked at him with this puzzling glimpse in his pupils once again, dropping his hand to reveal an angry red spot on his face that was sure to become purple soon.

“You know I'm right though,” his voice was almost a whisper, blowing a wave of warm air at Peter's face. Speaking, even this quiet, caused him visible pain. “He had hurt more people in his life than it's possible to count. He caused them trauma and nightmares, but I think I'm not the one to tell you this. You know it all by yourself.”

And with that he sat down, wincing at the pain blossoming in both his wound and face. Peter shot daggers at him once again, not caring that the man wasn't looking at him, and came back to his spot in the armchair. After looking at a page of freshly written equations he found out that he couldn't focus anymore. He huffed in irritation and grabbed his phone from the side of the table.

You are better than him, kid.

It was a lie, all of these were. Beck was a manipulator, a cruel and remorseless monster looking for a way to have an influence on him, and he couldn't let him do it again.

History likes to repeat itself, his mind supplied.

He opened a conversation with MJ and let his thumbs hover above the keyboard of his phone. What even should he write her?

how you doing with ned and betty?

The answer came within seconds despite it being the middle of her classes, and Peter smiled weakly. He loved her involvement in school stuff.

as usual, u know how much i love em.

He smirked in amusement, quickly disregarding his recent fight. He opened the window and got ready to reply her, already putting together some words in his mind when the next message popped up on his screen.

gonna bring u notes after school.

Peter felt a cold shiver run down his spine. No no no, he couldn't let her see Quentin Beck in his own fucking flat, she would *kill him* if she knew.

thanks! but pics are just fine, no need to come all the way here.

no prob, promised ur aunt i'll check on u.

What? Did May just start to conspire against him? Not only did Peter feel betrayed, but also belittled. Did she really think that he couldn't handle an injured man?

"Just great," he murmured, running a hand across his face. When he looked up, his gaze was met with a sight of Beck leaning back against the couch with closed eyes, pained look on his face. His cheek started to change colours, the centre already a light hue of purple, and he held his hand on his stomach, squeezing it slightly. The wound could have opened from the man's sharp moves and it probably needed a second series of disinfection and stitching.

"Just great," he repeated under his breath and made a move to stand.

Like he thought, half a dozen of stitches snapped, causing the wound to open in a few places and blood to drip lazily here and there. Luckily, the T-shirt didn't absorb it and was still clean when Beck took it off, once again seated on the closed toilet lid. Peter sighed as he prepared a cloth soaked in alcohol and disinfected a new thread and the needle from the day before.

"It would have held if you haven't been this stupid and haven't stood up," he murmured under his breath, pressing the cloth to Beck's abdomen and hearing a long, long hiss drawn out of him. At least the man knew better than to speak now; he remained silent, watching Peter's hands when they started stitching up the wound in places where the first thread had snapped. The boy guessed it was less painful for Beck and much faster for him than the previous time, but he made sure the man *did* feel it at least a bit.

"I meant what I said before, Peter," Beck declared, still watching Peter even as he was putting the needle and the rest of the things he had used back to the aid kit. He gripped the edge of the washbasin at the words, but Beck continued. "I meant it when I said that you're better than him. How do you think he would treat a person like me if they showed up on his doorstep? Do you really think he would care?"

"What does it matter now?" Peter snapped and turned to look directly at the man. He didn't look startled at all, and it made the boy even angrier. "Are you trying to soft-soap or something? Because it has no use. Just shut up and don't speak unless you absolutely have to."

He didn't wait for Beck to dress and join him this time – he turned on his heel and walked out of the bathroom, heading back to the living room. His tea was cold now and so he picked his mug up, making a beeline to the kitchen to pour it into the sink. On his way he passed by Beck who didn't really meet his eyes, once again seeming slightly timid and nervous, and honestly Peter was just tired of it all.

He wanted to get five minutes of fucking rest, but after the trip to Europe it wasn't a possibility, was it? Maybe even since Germany, or the moment a radioactive spider had bitten him. He had no

idea.

Having put the empty mug into the sink and washed the odor of alcohol off his hands, he took a deep calming breath and came back to the living room. Beck was installed on the couch again, the unfinished book in his hands and fingers drumming unconsciously on its cover. It was weird, to have Mysterio resting on his couch and reading one of his books. Strangely domestic even and half an hour ago the thought wouldn't make him this angry.

When he took a sit in the armchair, picking up his abandoned pen and opening one of the notebooks that laid on the coffee table, Beck glanced up from the book to look at him. Peter regarded him, pausing on his unkempt beard that looked a lot sloppier than in Europe.

"You should do something with this," he said, gesturing to Beck's beard with a hand. The man frowned and reached up to cup his own unshaven cheek. The boy rolled his eyes.

"I'll give you scissors later, alright? I have to keep an eye on you and I don't have time for this now."

Beck's frown deepened. "Why? What's gonna happen now?"

Peter sighed, dropping his gaze back to the opened chemistry notebooks laid in front of him.

"My friend, the one you tried to kill, is going to pop in. I have to stop her from committing the same act my Aunt tried. Which is, trying to beat you up and believe me, MJ isn't someone to be played with."

"Does everyone you know want to kill me?"

"Are you seriously surprised?" He glanced up at Beck to find him smiling with slight amusement.

"Not really, to be honest," he replied truthfully and with a dose of something that could be identified as bashfulness.

And in spite of himself, of the anger and resentment and hatred bubbling inside him, Peter smiled weakly.

inside of our DNA

Chapter Notes

Going public in a group of more than 2 people is illegal in my country right now and I feel like in one of those science-fiction movies. What the hell is even 2020?

This chapter is a roller-coaster of feelings and I have no regrets. Hope you like it!

Title from "Savages" by Marina & The Diamonds

Peter had to admit that MJ was actually a lot calmer than Aunt May – she didn't try to hit Beck, didn't yell at him, didn't even move from where she had first seen the man and was now piercing him with her fiery black eyes. Her behaviour was quite unnerving and both Peter and Beck felt that when their eyes locked awkwardly across the room.

"MJ?" The boy asked coyly, not daring to approach his friend. The girl's deep breath bounced against the walls.

"I need to hear just one reason why you let him stay here, but it has to be good," she said finally and Peter had never felt so speechless before. His eyes flew to Beck's again, the man's bruised face adorned with a frown, and back to the side of MJ's head. She kept her gaze fixed on the famous Mysterio, but it was blank, blank and hollow and Peter suddenly felt so, so bad.

"MJ—" He tried and cut off when her eyes locked with his. They seemed empty at first, yet the longer Peter looked into them, the more disappointment he saw. It felt like he was breaking her heart, in whatever way he could, and all of the sudden the loathing he had been feeling towards himself since Tony's death crawled deeper under his skin.

"Tell me why he's here," she demanded and Peter knew. He knew that after all she'd lived through, after all he'd brought up upon her by getting close to her, she started to lose patience reserved for him. It had to end one day – he just didn't expect it to be so soon.

"Listen, MJ, he came here injured, I couldn't have—"

"He tried to kill you, Peter," she interrupted him, probably sensing the amount of desperation in his words. She was good at stuff like this. "He manipulated you, tricked you into trusting him. I saw with my own eyes how bad he broke you, Peter. You stayed awake for three days after London and even now you walk around with your face all hollow because you don't sleep enough, and don't tell me you've forgiven him so quickly!" Her raised voice trembled at the end of the sentence, making Peter drop his eyes to the floor.

"I never said I have forgiven him," he muttered quietly, stuffing his hands into the pockets of his hoodie. "And he never asks because he knows I won't."

He heard some shuffling and frowned, looking up to find Beck standing up with a wince. Something told him that he would have to take care of his stitches again, but it wasn't the biggest of his concerns right now. The man looked at MJ with enough confidence to make her angrier, but

something that was new was the amount of regret that his bright eyes held. It surprised even Peter who had thought that spending this much time with Beck made him immune to his weird hidden behaviours.

“I’m aware that apologizing won’t change anything,” Beck started and MJ gritted her teeth, but before she could cut him off, he hurried with continuation, “I know this and I still want to apologize. I’m sorry for ruining your vacation, I’m sorry for hurting you and I’m sorry for– Fuck, okay,” he sighed heavily, averting his eyes under the weight of MJ’s gaze. Her expression remained unchanged. “I know I don’t deserve Peter’s mercy–”

“You deserve nothing,” she cut him short and the boy noted the way her hands curled into fists, suddenly trembling. “You deserve to have died there on that bridge. And I wish you did.”

It was sharp and brutal, but Peter couldn’t blame her. It was also his first wish when he had opened his door a day before.

But something had changed since then. He didn’t know what and how, yet when he thought about it, he didn’t want Beck to die. If it happened, it would happen and it would be fair, but he didn’t really wish for it. Weird.

The realization felt more than wrong.

“But he didn’t,” he spoke up, drawing attention of the other two. “And he has to face the consequences. But I– I can’t be the one to punish him, MJ. You know that I can’t.”

“But why are you helping him? Why do you care?” She didn’t look him in the eyes and it hurt, but it was probably for the better. He wouldn’t have been strong enough to bring himself to hold her gaze anyway.

“Because he’s just a man, MJ, and I think you see it now. He’s nothing without his illusions.”

“And what if he finds another way to hurt you? You’re at his fingertips, he doesn’t have to search for you anymore.”

“I can take of myself,” he replied softly and finally, finally she looked at him, her eyes no more furious. She seemed concerned and that was MJ he knew. “I can take of myself, MJ. And I’m literally the strongest teenager in the world. He doesn’t stand a chance if he pisses me off.”

She smiled gently, dropping her gaze to the floor. He glanced over at Beck who looked more than awkward, his hand subconsciously grasping at his stomach. Peter wondered if the fabric of the T-shirt was already soaked.

“I know it. *In theory*,” the girl said, her eyes back on Peter and now warmer. His heart ached a little less at the sight. “I’m just worried about you. He’s done a lot of damage to you. I *really* don’t want to lose you, Peter. I *can’t* lose you.”

“Hey, I’ll be fine, I’m fine, see?” He approached the girl with hesitation, yet when she didn’t move he put a hand on her forearm in attempt to console her. “In the long run, I’m an Avenger, remember?”

She snorted at that and wiped her nose with a sleeve of her jacket, sniffing quietly. “Yeah, I faintly recall you telling me this most absurd news in my life.”

“Hey,” he nudged her ribs with his elbow lightly, pouting to show his pretended hurt, but deep inside all he felt was relief. It looked like the situation was under control.

MJ glanced at Beck who was still standing in front of the couch with his gaze slightly confused, and peered at her friend. Silently, she took off her backpack and shuffled through its content to take out three quite thick notebooks.

“Those are chemistry, calculus and physics. Guessed you’re not too invested in literature, but if you’ll need it anyway, text me – I’ll send you pics.”

She thrust the notebooks into his hands, looked at Beck with a warning for the last time and turned on her heel. It surprised Peter so much that he almost dropped the items she had given him while trying to follow her. He gave up instead, dumping them onto the armchair and swiftly ran after MJ.

She was reaching for the doorknob when he caught up with her and put a hand on her arm. The girl frowned, but her expression softened as soon as Peter enveloped her in a tight hug.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered close to her ear and heard her sigh. His eyes felt watery.

“I know,” MJ replied as quietly, loosening her grip on him. She opened the door for herself, sending him a sad smile goodbye and she was gone, just like that, leaving Peter standing alone on his doorstep.

God, it was harder than he had imagined and left him feeling more like a fuckup than before.

When the lock rattled, Peter instantly knew that it was May. He straightened in his spot, leaning back in the armchair and looked over the coffee table to Beck. The man laid motionless on the couch with an arm thrown over his forehead, his eyes closed and even breathing shifting his chest up and down along with the finished book that was placed on it. Peter had checked on his wound earlier and found out that it didn’t open again, surprisingly, but another salty compress was more than necessary. The high but not scalding temperature of the cloth seemed to lull Beck to sleep, because when it cooled down, Peter had to pick it up from his already unconscious body.

The man looked... peaceful when asleep. His features relaxed and wrinkles smoothed out, leaving a face of someone who hadn’t committed all those crimes and hadn’t spent countless of nights on planning a revenge that wouldn’t even work out. In a way Peter felt bad for him. He really did waste his life on something unreachable, something that hadn’t brought him anything apart from pain and hatred of others, and loneliness, so much loneliness that Peter felt crushed by it just by thinking about it.

His mind must have been as dark as Peter’s in some moments.

The door opened, snatching the boy out of his thoughts. He looked from the sleeping man just in time to see May walking into the flat with a strained smile. Upon seeing Peter’s red eyes and

tousled hair she stopped dead in tracks.

“Are you okay, honey?” She asked, a frown adoring his face and he felt so stupid for letting another person worry about him. He nodded and put on the most honest smile he could muster.

“Yeah, yeah, May, I’m good.” *Always good* . “I’m just tired. Had to do quite a lot of school stuff.”

She didn’t look fully convinced, but after eighteen years of living with him she knew better than to try and force him to tell the truth. She knew that he would eventually choose the right moment.

“My smart boy,” she replied with a wide smile, her voice so warm and authentic, and oh so *proud* that he felt his eyes getting all watery again. She closed the door and took off her coat, hanging in by the door. “I’ll make you dinner, is that right? What do you say about spaghetti?”

He shot her a smile, warmer and happier than the one before, because honestly, she was one of those few people who could paint his life in slightly brighter hues.

“Sound awesome.”

The woman made her way to the kitchen, tapping her heels on the wooden floor and the noise made Beck stir in his spot. His eyes blinked open with a slightly frightened look and it may or may not be one of his most amusing expressions. Peter laughed under his breath and pressed a fist to his mouth, trying and failing to stifle the sound, because as soon as Beck’s eyes found him, they softened along with his lips who curled up into a smile.

“My Aunt is here,” Peter announced quietly, a small smile stuck on his face. Beck’s eyes widened and he sat up quickly, his hand automatically travelling to rest on his stomach. Peter noted with content the absence of the previous wince that had appeared every time the man moved.

“Is she still—”

“Yes, I’m still mad at your ass.”

When Peter looked to the side, he saw May glaring at the man from above the kitchen counter and something about the whole situation was even more amusing. He had no idea how he managed not to laugh out loud or even smile wider.

Beck, on the other hand, apparently didn’t find this half as funny. He averted his eyes from May to Peter, confusion clear in his eyes. He had visible trouble comprehending every single thing that Aunt May said or did and Peter wasn’t the one to blame him. After having been raised by her, he still had that problem.

“Come on, Peter, I need you help with dinner.”

Watching Beck being bullied by May was probably the greatest entertainment that Peter could get

right now. The man was clearly confused by everything she said and she didn't seem to have had enough even when he started to zone out at some point, because he stopped listening to her and focused on whatever he was thinking about.

It got even funnier when she started to clean up after herself and still complained while Beck sat hunched in his seat, an almost empty plate in his hands and gaze fixed on it. Peter observed it from the armchair, legs crossed and MJ's physics textbook in his lap, but it was slowly draining him and causing a headache that buzzed behind his eyes.

"Are you going out with Happy tonight?" He asked halfway through her monologue about legal consequences of attempted murder, too tired to hear any more on this subject. May spun around so fast that she looked like she was about to get a whiplash.

"Actually, I was planning to stay at his place tonight. Is that alright with you, sweetheart?"

"Yeah, is fine, May."

Silence settled between the three of them and the air seemed to vibrate with nervousness, but what didn't feel like that in Peter's life lately?

"Why did you tell MJ to check on me?"

His aunt looked over at him with a frown. "What do you mean, Peter?"

"Why did you tell MJ to check on me?" He repeated, not exactly caring that Beck was listening to this conversation. In the corner of his eye he saw the man lifting up his head to stare at him.

"I was worried about you, Peter. You could have written me anything and it didn't have to be true."

"I don't lie to you," he replied and winced at his words. Okay, it wasn't entirely true, but since he had told her about being Spider-Man, there were no more serious secrets between them. And honestly, he didn't expect her to tell him about her whole life either.

She stepped forward, leaning over the counter slightly with a kitchen cloth in her hands. "I know, honey, but I didn't know what to do. I couldn't have come here myself and didn't want to bother you by calling you every twenty minutes. And besides, I think that MJ deserves to know what's going on in your life anyway," she looked at him meaningfully.

"I know, May. She does," he sighed heavily and ran a hand across his face, scrubbing off his weariness. "I just— I don't want you to be worried about me all the time because of the smallest things. I'm an adult, May, I really can deal with my life."

"You'll always be my kid, Peter, and I'll always be worried about you. But that's how it is and I can't change it. I'm sorry."

"Is fine," the boy murmured, overwhelming guilt and warmth blossoming in his chest. "I just want you to live your life, not spend it fretting over my safety every second of every day."

"I *am* living my life, sweetheart," she assured him, her bright smile back on her naturally tan features. "And I have Happy to help me with that, remember?"

That brought a smile also on Peter's lips, slightly tired and heavy one, but a smile nonetheless. He could swear that he saw Beck's face relax into a similar expression, yet he didn't dare to check.

May made a beeline to his armchair and when she reached it, she bent over and placed a soft kiss on Peter's forehead.

"And I want you to live your life, too, you know?"

Peter nodded, knowing that it was slightly more difficult than that. And he didn't know how to change it.

May left a few minutes before seven, making it clear than Peter should call her whenever something was wrong and she promised to come with Happy then, keeping her eyes trained on Beck. The man didn't get up from the couch, but when the door closed after the woman, not without her leaving another warm kisses on Peter's forehead and his cheek, he visibly relaxed.

"Your aunt is something else," he stated when Peter locked the door and returned to his seat to gather the textbooks and binders.

"Yeah, Parkers are like that," the boy replied and smiled with a dose of amusement. His Aunt really knew how to make him feel less gloomy and more alive, more like a normal teenager he always wanted to be.

Beck snorted at that, his eyes twinkling and wrinkles around them deepening. "Not gonna argue with that."

It felt weirdly domestic once again, with the sun outside setting and the room dimming slowly, both of them seated in their comfy spots and smiling. The air smelled different now than a day before, more welcoming, the atmosphere between them calmer. Suddenly, Europe was forgotten and the Blip had never happened, and oh how much Peter wanted this to be true.

It would be so much easier then.

to be there at dawn

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for posting so late, my school started online classes and it's more tiring than I've ever imagined. I have love-hate relationship with this chapter, it seems kinda rushed? I dunno, I just needed to show you how severe Peter's mental health issues are and this happened.

[Okay, I just edited this piece, because it was hella messy and made no sense. I hope it's better now. Let me know what you think in the comments.]

WARNINGS: PANIC ATTACK, PTSD

Title from "Those Nights" by Bastille.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Beck's fingers wrapped around the scissors' handle, Peter's insides did a weird flip and his skin started tingling anxiously. He knew that the man wouldn't even try anything, not to mention actually succeeding in hurting him, but the mere fact of a sharp object placed in Beck's hands made him dizzy. He almost felt like back in Europe, the blades of the scissors shining in the intense bathroom light like the lustrous edges of Mysterio's costume, the man's face reflecting in the wide mirror hanging above the washbasin. Peter's throat tightened when Beck squeezed the handles to cut experimentally through the air, but he stood his ground, leaning slightly on the door frame.

"It's been some time since I've done this," Beck mumbled under his breath, more to himself than to Peter. The boy adjusted the navy blue hoodie rolling up his stomach and crossed his arms on his chest without a word. He waited patiently until the man started actually trimming his beard, bending his arms in uncomfortable angles and wincing slightly every time the scissors missed.

But he still felt restless as if Beck was about to jump at him any second, the blades aiming at his neck and his veins and arteries, about to cut them open and making him bleed to death. Of course, his countless nightmares included also this kind of torture that repeated dozens and dozens of times until the sun would rise and his alarm ring. He would wake up then with his hands wrapped securely around his throat, touching and checking and panting like he was about to fall back unconscious from hyperventilating.

He was on a verge of turning into a paranoiac.

To shift his attention from the scissors, Peter glanced at the very, *very* occupied man. Beck had his clear bright eyes fixated on his own reflection, precisely on his unruly beard that was slowly reminding Peter more and more of the one he had been presenting in Europe. His hair was ruffled from constantly laying on the couch and a little flat on the left side, yet only now Peter noticed that it was slightly shorter than two weeks ago. When it wasn't slicked back like before, its floes reached only past Beck's forehead and seemed askew, as if the man had cut them all by himself without a mirror within reach.

Well, he *did* look slightly more handsome, Peter had to admit. Long hair and thick beard made him

look older, but now, with the latter resembling a stubble, his crystal eyes stood out more distinctly and pierced Peter sharply when he looked back at him.

“Think I’m done,” he said, a hesitant smile creeping on his lips. He reached out to give the scissors back to Peter and it took the boy every single fibre of strong will left in his body to stop himself from flinching.

But somehow he managed, clutching the scissors and moving forward to put them back into the aid kit that laid on the bottom of the bathroom cabinet. Beck brushed past Peter to make room for him since there wasn’t that much space, heading to the living room.

It was well past ten and Peter started to feel the extra weariness pull at his eyes and muscles, yet he found out that he could hardly relax without going outside in his Spider-Man suit. Guilt started to blossom deep in his chest again, tearing at his heart and lungs, but he knew that he couldn’t exit the flat just like that and leave Beck alone. His Peter Tingle (*dammit again*) told him that it wouldn’t be safe – he still didn’t know what the hell were Beck’s true intentions beside healing, if there were any at all.

And apart from that Peter could really use another night in and rest.

The boy picked up his phone that was laying on the coffee table and flipped through the notifications. A handful of messages checking up on him from Ned (*and Betty*), a photo of Happy smiling and May giving him a peck on the cheek that she had sent him an hour ago and a bunch of memes that MJ had apparently decided were well suited for him. *Freshly picked* , as she had described them below. He smiled, downloading two of them and sending her a laughing emoji before opening his news feed.

There weren’t any articles about crimes or anything suspicious happening in Queens, but he checked twice and thrice to make sure. A thing about a charity fighting for animal rights, an advertisement from a new diner that had opened only a week ago. An article on a new graffiti meant to be a Tony Stark memorial that caught Peter’s eyes for a longer moment. Just in case, he scrolled through the feed one more time before locking the phone and depositing in back on the wooden table.

Now he had to take care of another issue: where the fuck should Beck sleep? He shouldn’t be sleeping on the couch – his wound was still quite fresh, the stitches healing and Peter didn’t want to risk the mild infection of Beck’s abdomen to worsen. Beside, their couch was of a lovely beige colour and May would kill him if she found stains on its leather. Second option, which was also out of question, was May’s bed, however she would kill him even harder if he let a criminal crash on it.

In this situation Peter had only one possible solution. His own bed.

It wasn’t difficult to decide which items in his room were the most important – he didn’t have much apart from his clothes, a dozen of school books, a box with comics and three or four quite complicated Star Trek ship models. There was also a shelf with tiny figures from various movie series that he’d been hoarding since the age of ten and was really, *really* proud of, but none of those things were something he needed to keep out of the man’s reach.

He gathered his laptop with the charger, his suit and the E.D.I.T.H. glasses, and then he was out of the room. Beck looked at him with a surprise and bewilderment when he had put his things carefully on the coffee table, yet kept the glasses hooked on the collar of his hoodie.

“You’re going to be sleeping in my room,” Peter announced, eyeing the man cautiously. Beck’s gaze dropped to the glasses and the boy instantly felt the need to hide them away, but he stopped himself and put his hands on his hips. “And you’re not going to touch my stuff.”

Beck looked up at him, a flock of hair falling onto his forehead. “Wasn’t planning to.”

“Good.”

And that’s how they ended in separate rooms in the end – Beck in Peter’s, the boy in May’s, both of them after a quick shower. Peter felt slightly uncomfortable leaving fucking *Mysterio* in his own room that he always treated as his sanctuary, but having his Spider-Man suit within reach and E.D.I.T.H. in a drawer of his Aunt’s night stand made him a little more confident. He’d removed Beck from the list of people being able to control the Stark’s system the same day that he’d thought *Mysterio* had died, so it wasn’t like the man could do something with it. He was safe, at last.

The boy laid in May’s funnily soft bed with the sheets reaching to his armpits for quite a long time, listening to the sound of Queens that crept into the room through a half-open window. Thanks to his improved hearing, he could recognize a faint sound of Beck’s breathing that echoed through the flat, however he tuned it out and focused on the gentle noise of cars passing by the building. Once in a while he heard an ambulance alarm and his muscles tightened for a moment each time, yet soon it blended into the background of his city lullaby that never failed to make him fall asleep in the end.

When it happened, he was out in less than a minute.

He would never forget the way Tony’s heartbeat had just–

Stopped. Simple like that. In one moment it was there, shallow and slow, but it was there, beating in Peter’s ears and making his body shiver with each note; in the second, there was only silence that rang and rang and rang through the boy’s mind, bringing a horrible headache that wouldn’t fade for the next six hours.

And just like that, after this one short moment, Tony wasn’t there as well.

The setting changed to the cemetery again, but it was more than just green smoke and blank tombstones now. It was an old graveyard that he had once seen during a school trip; a graveyard that was told to be a shelter for hundreds of soldiers that had fought in the American Civil War. All Peter could see were lines of cracked stones, some with names and some unknown, and in the middle of it all there stood a proud white memorial with Tony’s name and his Iron Man heart pressed into the cold stone.

“I thought you learned on my mistakes,” Tony’s voice resonated in the air, however Peter couldn’t

avert his eyes from the letters carved into the rock. The man seemed to stand behind him, just one foot or so, and the boy desperately wanted to turn around and look, but he just couldn't.

"I thought you were better than me, Peter."

The last word, the boy's name, vibrated in the freezing air as the pitch of the voice shifted and suddenly there was nothing but Tower Bridge swimming in green smoke and the familiar silhouette standing a couple of feet away. Peter's body instinctively took a fighting stance.

"I thought you wouldn't trust Quentin Beck," Beck's voice said, cutting through the smoke like a knife through butter, yet nothing changed. No more drones, no more illusions, nothing except the green.

Peter's muscles started to tremble from exhaustion, his knees like jelly and legs swaying. He barely maintained his balance, but he managed, refusing to show his weakness even though it was evident.

The smoke started to slowly dissolve, revealing the figure standing on the other side of the bridge bit by bit, but Peter somehow couldn't see it. One thing he saw, though, were the crystal clear eyes that seemed to pierce his soul with just one look.

"You should wake up."

He jerked awake with a loud and shrill scream that seemed to bounce against the walls and stun him for a second. Only now he noticed how much his eyes hurt, and how wet from cascades of tears his cheeks and chin felt. His muscles didn't stop trembling, but now the pain was worse, more realistic, and suddenly his lungs weren't big enough to grant him proper breathing. He struggled to take a breath and when he finally managed, it was too shallow and short, and he had to repeat and repeat and repeat, and couldn't *stop* and—

"Peter! Look at me, kid," a gentle but firm voice said, and its tone was so deeply soothing that the boy instantly fell under its charm. He tried to follow the instruction, but it was so damn *hard* to do anything beside breathing and even this one action took away more concentration than he got, and *oh my God he was going to pass out soon just like he had done so many times before and May wasn't there to wake him up and save him and—*

"Do you hear my breathing? Peter! Do you hear my breathing?" A sharp nod. "Good. Try to copy. I will take a breath now, do it as well and try to make it as long as possible, okay?"

Another nod. Peter heard a low hiss of air being sucked in, and tried to mimic the action. His lungs burned like on fire, but he didn't let it distract him.

A breath, yeah. He could do that.

"Hold it. I will breathe out now. Try to follow me."

He focused his entire attention on the slightly louder noise that came with a blow of warm air, and tried to follow the instruction, he really tried, but he couldn't, he was *out of air* —

"Peter, I'm with you all the time, you hear me? I've got you, Peter. Take it slow, we've got time."

No, we *don't*—

“Yes, we do. I will take a breath again. Please, try to follow,” the voice almost whispered, so tender and soft and so *caring* that Peter just *had* to try. He didn’t want to disappoint the Voice.

Slowly, slowly his breathing calmed and breaths became longer and deeper. His lungs still burned, but it was a good burn now, the kind you get when resurfacing from a six feet deep pool after a minute. He finally stopped to gasp and his hearing cleared, just like his vision that needed only a few seconds to adjust to the darkness of the room.

Beck was sitting on the edge of May’s bed with a tense look on his face, full of worry (*concern?*) and fear. His eyes were fixed on Peter, brows furrowed and hair tousled from sleep, and when the boy looked down to stare at the creased cover, he noted the way their hands were joined in his lap – fingers laced and Beck’s thumb stroking circles on his skin. His own hand was sweaty, just like the rest of his body felt, but the man didn’t seem to mind as he squeezed it reassuringly.

“You were screaming in your sleep,” Beck stated, his eyes never leaving Peter. “When I came here you were tangled in your sheets and hyperventilating. I tried to wake you up, but it didn’t work. This,” he squeezed his hand one more time, equally gently, “did.”

“I’m sorry,” the boy murmured, lifting up his free hand and wiping his eyes with a fist.

He felt so *stupid* for showing Beck how weak he was, stupid for letting him see how bad it could get sometimes, but at the same time–

It didn’t look like Beck minded, right? It was even worse.

“It’s okay,” the man whispered and his voice was so gentle again, so unlike him. So unlike the man Peter had met in Europe. So unlike the man standing on his doorstep a day before. “It’s all fine. At least it worked, right? Thought you were going to suffocate.”

Yeah, it gets close sometimes. “Never happened before. I don’t know what happened tonight.”

It was all bullshit and he knew it, yet he hoped that Beck wouldn’t see through him.

Well, he sure did look like it, but he didn’t say a word on the matter.

“Maybe you should try to sleep again? Or do you want, I don’t know. Tea?”

Peter almost snorted at that. Fucking *tea* . He suggested him getting fucking tea.

Hey, but at least he tried, didn’t he?

“I think I’ll pass. I should sleep,” the boy answered, slowly loosening his death grip on Beck’s hand. It was certain to leave some painful marks – it definitely stretched the tendons – but the man didn’t seem to mind as he just took his hand away and didn’t stop staring at Peter.

“Alright.”

And with that he stood up, throwing Peter one last glance before heading to the door. The boy felt like he needed to speak, to say something, but he felt so tired and so, so sick and cold to the bone that with the sound of the door closing his head hit the pillow again. The electronic clock standing on the nightstand blinked and exhibited red numbers that formed 3:23, and so he pushed the sheets away, just in case, forcing his eyes to shut.

God, it was going to be a long, long night.

His dreamless sleep was interrupted by a soft melody of his phone alarm that echoed through the slightly chilly room, meant to ring at exactly half past six. He blinked his eyes open, barely being able to lift his heavy and inflamed eyelids, and sat up. His entire body hurt, head throbbed and the only thing he could focus on was that he really, really needed to eat. His stomach felt raw when he crawled out of May's bed, adjusted the sweatpants that kept rolling up his calves and made a beeline to the kitchen, shivering slightly. He guessed that leaving the window ajar for the night wasn't his best idea.

When he closed the door behind himself, he was met with a sight of Beck standing by the window in the living room, his back to Peter. From where the boy stood, he saw the man having his arms crossed on his chest and staring through the glass. He had one of Peter's old sweat shorts on that wrapped around his muscular thighs and a grey hoodie that didn't even belong to the boy; he faintly recalled getting a wrong size of his school's sweatshirt and never getting rid of it, even though he got the right one in the end. It was the first thing which Peter saw him wearing that wasn't clinging to his large body like latex – it was even slightly bigger, drowning his long arms in its sleeves.

Peter cleared his throat to draw Beck's attention and succeeded – the man turned around on his heel and looked at him with question in his eyes. His face was still kind of gentle when he stared at Peter, but it wasn't the same level of tenderness that the boy had seen a couple of hours ago.

"Thought that I could make some breakfast," he said with a solid amount of awkwardness in his voice. Beck nodded wordlessly and waited for Peter to reach the kitchen before approaching it himself – in the meanwhile, the dark-haired opened the massive fridge, skimming through the shelves. The fridge itself was huge, much higher than Peter and deep enough to swallow more than half of his arm. The spider's bite made his appetite grow to the size of a legion of factory workers and not long after May had found out about his superpowers, she had purchased them a refrigerator three times bigger than their previous one to have a place for all those products than an average teenage Spider-Man should eat.

After the Blip, he had developed some eating issues that caused their enormous fridge to become mostly useless, and since London he couldn't really eat more than he absolutely had to. It meant walking around with a growling stomach for a few hours every day, but he couldn't find a way to change it. He *had to* eventually, and it better be soon, because not eating enough meant making his body weaker and that wouldn't be good in any situation – especially not if the body belonged to Spider-Man.

"Any special wishes or is cereal with milk fine?"

He didn't have to turn around to feel Beck lifting his eyes from the floor to look at him in his usual curious way. "Cereal with milk is fine."

Peter nodded and took to preparing their breakfast that including heating up milk and pouring cornflakes into two bowls, reaching out to fill a kettle with water at the same time. He hated eating his first meal without his morning tea and nothing was ever going to change it. May used to try to persuade him from drinking it every day, for his health, but when she'd seen him get thinner and thinner with each weak she gave up on her tries, happy to see him swallow literally anything.

Also, they still had some coffee in their cupboard and since Beck liked it, maybe he would appreciate getting it with his breakfast too.

"Peter?"

The boy's head snapped up from the stove to look at the man who stood coyly in the kitchen's doorstep. He had his hands in the vast pocket of the hoodie, his dark calves standing out against the kitchen's white tiles. Peter raised his eyebrows in a sign that he was listening.

"How often does this happen?" Beck asked somewhat quietly, but his voice was still firm, his crystal eyes fixated on the boy and suddenly Peter felt an overwhelming urge to run. Nightmare Beck peeked from the man's irises.

I thought you wouldn't trust Quentin Beck.

"Sometimes," he lied smoothly, pouring boiling water into two mugs. "Some nights it's like that, but usually it's just nothingness." *Liar. You haven't slept two days in a row without almost suffocating for half a year now.*

Beck broke the eye contact, noting the beautiful patterns of the paint covering the walls. "Is it worse after your trip to Europe?"

"Yes." *Finally, some truth.* "May doesn't really like leaving me alone for the night, but I don't want to be the reason she doesn't live her life to the fullest."

"And you have to deal with choking all by yourself?"

He pondered on the question for a moment.

He'd never really thought of that. He'd been staying alone for most of the days of the week now and almost every single night he had this kind of a nightmare that would leave him fighting for his breath, but somehow he never happened to be suffocating without May in their apartment. Maybe it was sheer luck, maybe his Spider sense. But he didn't want to see what it would be like without someone to wake him up.

So he shrugged, not ready to discuss the matter.

The conversation seemed to be over, but only until they started eating. Then the man cleared his throat, getting all uncomfortable again and Peter frowned.

"I'm sorry," Beck announced and really, the boy wasn't sure if he'd heard right. "I'm sorry for bringing out more reasons for your nightmares. I didn't know."

He wanted to say it's fine, he wanted to shrug just like he always did when it came to his mental issues.

But dealing with Beck taught him some lesson.

He nodded, not exactly accepting the apologies and not exactly rejecting them. He avoided eye contact and focused on his cereal. “Thank you for waking me up yesterday.”

The words seemed to loosen the weird tension between them caused by the night incident and Peter found out that it was easier to breathe. It definitely didn’t make him forgive Beck – and he didn’t think that he was capable of doing it – but it made his hatred feel less fiery and more steady. More like the rest of his mental issues that laid on the bottom of his mind.

Maybe they could make it work, somehow. Maybe they didn’t have to be full-time enemies.

Chapter End Notes

Reminding you that this story has its own [playlist](#)! (Made with my sweet sweet girlfriend thanks to her lovely music taste!)

beat is a chemical

Chapter Notes

I'm having biology and chemistry online classes every day and honestly? This shit's exhausting.

Where will they let me out? I haven't seen my girlfriend for a month now, send help :(I hope you're all safe and healthy, and staying inside even though it drives us all insane. We'll get through this, guys <3

EXTREME WARNING FOR THIS CHAPTER: SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, HOPELESSNESS AND OTHER SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION.

Title from "Chlorine" by Twenty One Pilots.

"I just want to be like you."

"Then I want you to be better."

It had hurt back then, hearing it on that sunlit roof and watching Mister Stark's face fall down with disappointment. Disappointment in *Peter*. It had been embarrassing to stand there, in full superhero suit, but feeling like a complete failure; having to look up eventually and meet Tony's eyes. It had been the most heartbreaking and distressing thing to hear back then – oh, how much he still had had to live through. How many heartbreaks to survive, how many fears and anxieties to develop.

But would going back and starting from there, or from any other moment in his life, change something? Or was he just doomed for a dark and sad life?

"I thought you were better than me, Peter."

This again. It sounded so *realistic*, so likely for Tony to say it – because he had never stopped believing in him. Even when Peter couldn't deal with anything in his life, even when he had fucked up every single thing as Spider-Man, even when he had proved that he was simply too weak to even think of being a superhero.

Tony had never stopped believing in him. He had this cruel, stereotypically male way of showing that he *cared* and *believed*, and at first it was hard to adjust to his way of being, but when he had finally managed, it all fell into place. It was *right*, to think of Tony as his father figure – so right and simple, and making Peter's heart long for that deep emotional connection with someone else apart from May.

"I thought you wouldn't trust Quentin Beck."

Yeah, it had been easy to fall for Mysterio's lies in Europe – Peter had belatedly found someone who could soothe his pain, if only a little. Someone he could confide in, someone who had believed in him; someone he could *trust*. He had felt like an utter idiot after discovering the truth, and he felt even worse now since Beck's explanations.

Tony had trusted him too, and look what it cost. Peter's friends had almost died, half of Europe was endangered and it was just because Beck felt slightly offended. The truth was that it wouldn't have happened if Tony hadn't put so much faith and trust in him.

And even now, even though Peter knew about it all, he still felt like he was trusting Beck subconsciously. All those times when he had stood with his back to the man? All those times that he had handed him a sharp object, like a knife or scissors? The night when he trusted him so fully that he practically let the man take control of his breathing, of his life?

Man, it was fucked up. *Peter* was fucked up. And now he was stuck with his deadly enemy in his own flat, for a week.

Less than a week by now, his mind supplied and Peter sighed. Still a couple of long, long days.

Only when a soft sound of pages being turned over filled the room, did Peter realize that he'd been stuck on the same physics question for the last thirty or so minutes. He huffed with exasperation, slamming his notebook shut and leaning back in his armchair. Beck glanced up from his spot on the couch.

"Need some help?"

Peter rolled his eyes, feeling his annoyance (and self-hatred?) bubbling up underneath the surface of his skin. Once again he felt dog-tired and worn-out, and just wanted to take a very long nap.

"From you? I don't think so."

"Hey, I'm quite good at science. Maybe not an expert in biology, but physics," the man said and sat up, focusing his attention on Peter. He gently slid a cardboard bookmark between the pages of the book and put it aside on a cushion. "And I guess that's physics you're working on."

"Yeah, physics," Peter confirmed with a nod. "But I don't feel like doing it now."

"That's okay. So, maybe, what do you feel like doing?"

The boy looked at him with a frown. "What?"

"What do you feel like doing?" Beck repeated, leaning forward and resting his elbows on his knees. He had the same hoodie on as in the morning and he'd replaced the shorts for his own freshly washed jeans, but his hair was still disheveled from sleeping. He was resembling Mysterio less less with each day and it made Peter uncomfortable and at peace at the same time.

"What do I feel like doing?" He echoed, mostly to himself. What the hell *should* he feel like doing?

He didn't remember taking actual breaks during his learning sessions. They always had the same pace – first question, then another and another and another. Sometimes he took a sip of water between the equations and sentences, yet he never tried to rest. It felt robotic at times, but if breaking his pace held a risk of overthinking, he wasn't sure if he wanted to take it.

But he wasn't alone now, right? And it wasn't like Beck was going to let him overthink, with his stupid questions and irrelevant remarks.

"I don't know," he answered honestly, crossing his arms on his chest. He looked around the room in an attempt to find a clue and when his gaze fell to a picture of him and Tony that stood on a shelf under the TV, he averted his eyes quickly.

I thought you wouldn't trust Quentin Beck.

"Why elementals?" He asked out of blue, not exactly knowing where the question came from. Beck looked equally surprised.

The man shrugged. "They seemed like an Avengers level threat and were a perfect illusion material. They didn't have to speak, didn't interact with people." Beck looked aside, playing with his fingers in a nervous manner. "And they were kind of dope, you have to admit."

"They weren't dope from my point of view," Peter replied and raised his eyebrows. "In case you haven't noticed, they also kind of almost scared me and half of Venice to death."

"Well, their purpose wasn't to kill anyone."

"But those random buildings falling down thanks to your illusions? They kind of did kill some people, you know."

At this, the man looked up and locked his baby blue eyes with Peter's brown ones. "My intention wasn't to kill people. It was an accident."

"Aiming at my head was an accident?"

"I said I'm sorry, Peter."

"I don't give a fuck about your apologies, Beck," the boy spit out, trying and failing (*again*) to control his anger. He gripped his arms tighter to ground himself a little. "What were you thinking when you lifted your gun and pointed at me? And it doesn't matter than I'm Peter Parker, or Spider-Man, or whatever. What *does* matter is that I'm a fucking teenager. Imagine anyone, *anyone* in my place. Would you kill them? Would you shoot an eighteen-year-old?"

"Yes," was the quick response and Peter felt like he had been slapped. His eyes widened, fixated on the man whose crystal blue irises darkened, a shadow ghosting over them. "I would kill them if they endangered my mission. I wouldn't hesitate."

Peter took a shaky breath.

So this man was a monster. A literal psychopath that he was hiding in his own house, taking care of, feeding and dressing. A monster who had nearly killed his friends.

A man that he shouldn't have trusted, just like Tony shouldn't have done it either.

"You should've pulled the trigger earlier," he whispered and closed his eyes, feeling the whole world crumbling around him, crowding him, crushing. He felt his lungs tightening, but he couldn't give the man satisfaction. He *couldn't* panic around him again. Not again. Not ever.

"What did you say?"

When Peter tried to breathe slowly, just like May had taught him, he found out that his heart

seemed to be melting with overwhelming pain. He couldn't keep doing this. God, he was so tired.

"Hey, kid, don't panic." *Don't panic. As if it was ever a choice.*

"I'm here with you, okay? Just like tonight. I'm with you."

He took a deep, deep and shaky breath. He *could* do this. "Why-why did you wait?"

"Wait for what?" A hand on his knee, warm and steady, and Peter tried to focus on it. He knew that it could help him.

"Y-you could've... You couldn't just shot me when I— when I was talking. Why did you wait?"

Silence. The hand stayed in its spot, motionless, and Peter took a breath after another, trying to make them regular, to make them solid. Trying to control the fire in his lungs that was slowly dying out.

"I don't know," Beck replied quietly, sounding unsure, and Peter snorted at that soundlessly.

"It would've been better if you didn't wait."

The boy felt the grasp of Beck's hand tightening on his knee. "Don't say that, Peter. Don't you ever say that."

"*Why?*" The boy suddenly blinked his eyes open and looked straight at Beck whose face was merely ten or so inches away. The moment he felt how wet his cheeks were, he knew his eyes must have been reddened and puffy again. "Why should I not say this?"

"Because you're *eighteen years old* , for fuck's sake! You have your whole life to come, why the hell would you say this?"

"It's complicated," he sniffed pathetically and looked away, fixing his gaze on the window, but then Beck's hand tightened again, although it felt somewhat gentler this time.

"Try me," his voice replied in a low tone, the same deep and soothing tone he had used in the night. And God, it was so tempting to finally tell someone, to finally spit out what was going on inside his head for days and days now.

And really, he didn't have anyone else to confide in on this matter – May wouldn't understand, him and Ned weren't quite the same, and he didn't feel like MJ would appreciate hearing about his problems when she clearly had her own; and Tony? Tony was dead – so what did he have to lose?

"It's just," he started, and it felt like a huge step. A deep breath, a glance to the side to check if Beck was listening; he was. "I'm a fuck up, you know? Always doing something wrong when I ought to be doing everything right. I'm not even a decent Avenger. A coward, a freak, a fucking *failure* . And now Tony is dead because of me, and—"

"Wait," Beck cut him off with a frown. His crystal eyes shone in the sunlight, almost lucid, piercing through Peter as if the man could see his soul. "How the hell is Tony's death your fault?"

Silence, again. A sniff. A glance to the window.

“You’ve said so yourself,” he mumbled, shame and embarrassment taking over. “You’ve said that if I was good enough, he would be alive.”

That goddamn silence that made Peter shiver even though the temperature in the room was quite high. The stillness of the air that bit into his skin and made it crawl, made it itch. Sometimes he was almost sure he was turning into a schizophrenic.

“Peter,” Beck said so quietly that the boy wasn’t sure if he had spoken at all. Peter looked at him with his drooping from tiredness eyelids and was met with an even deeper frown, Beck’s eyes filled with something quizzical, something Peter couldn’t quite perceive. “Has Europe stuck to you?”

“Quite,” Peter shrugged and lifted his hand to wipe at his wet cheek. There was much more than this, but he didn’t lie saying that Europe *was* there, somewhere in the middle. “But it’s not like I want to kill myself. I just— I just don’t feel like living sometimes, that’s all. It’s not bad.”

“I wouldn’t disregard it so much after tonight and after what I’ve just heard.”

“You know what they say. Someone somewhere always has it worse.”

“But it’s their problem, Peter. We live now and here. And it’s your problems that matter.”

Wow, how fucking thoughtful of him. “I feel like it might be important to point out that you have literally almost fucking killed me. Don’t you try to be my therapist right now.”

“I’m not trying— Peter, listen,” the man sighed heavily and Peter wanted to follow through just to prove Beck how big of a bitch the other man was, but he thought better of it. No need to snap. “I have one thing that I really want you to know, okay?”

He stopped and waited with his eyes fixated on the boy. The hand on Peter’s knee started to burn and he had no idea what the hell Beck was at, so he just nodded, hoping to speed up the whole process of the other talking.

He wasn’t quite ready to hear the talking itself.

“Peter, listen,” Beck repeated, this time softer, but still firm, “ As far as I know, you haven’t hurt anyone on purpose, have you? You haven’t killed anyone. You have literally *no reason* to blame yourself for anything.”

The words had a dash of falsity to them, but how hearing them from a world-famous criminal could be different? Peter shook his head, feeling a mixture of perplexity and scepticism.

“You know that there’s more than just murder than can make someone a bad person,” he huffed and turned his head to look at the brightly lit window. The sun was at its zenith, nearly blinding the boy as he caught a glimpse of a beam that was reflected by the glass. He liked days like this – warm and sunny and optimistic, days that felt a little bit easier to get through with the sun shining above his head.

“You’re not a bad person, Peter. I know a lot of bad people and you’re not one of them,” the man replied and shifted his weight to the other foot; crouching for longer seemed to be straining his muscles.

“You should sit down, old man,” Peter commented, making Beck laugh faintly; the one-liner seemed to have lightened the mood, and the boy let himself smile softly at the realization.

“I’m not that old.”

“Yeah, yeah, keep telling yourself that, grandpa.”

“I’m only what, fifteen years older than you? It won’t be long until you’re my age.”

Peter rolled his eyes, his dark thoughts somewhat slowly hiding in the back of his head again, and wiped his cheeks once more; they were dry, at last, and he felt lighter. Beck’s hand retreated at the sight of his small smile, and Peter’s knee suddenly felt so bare and cold that he bashfully wished the man wouldn’t have moved.

“I meant what I said, Peter,” Beck said, gaining back Peter’s attention. “You’re not a bad person. Believe me, I would know if you were.”

“Because you’re one?”

“I’m not denying.”

“So you’re admitting?”

The man shrugged, but a coy smile found its way onto his lips. “There’s a time for everything, right?”

Okay, the boy definitely hadn’t expected that. His wide eyes locked with Beck’s baby blue irises and the man shrugged again.

“Don’t look at me like that,” he mumbled under his breath, looking away quickly. “I may be a psychopath, but I’m not hiding it at least.”

“You were in Europe. Quite professionally, I must say.”

“Well, my objective was rather different then, don’t you think?”

That damn smile again, those crystal blue eyes back on Peter. He felt a need to squirm when the man’s gaze found him again, and it took him all he had not to look away.

It was *weird* .

“So you’re not here to murder me in my sleep?” He joked slightly, feeling like he needed to say something to avoid his further embarrassment. Beck laughed again, this time louder and more confident, and Peter felt like fucking John Mulaney. Was he so funny or was Beck just high all the time?

“Not planning to.”

“Good. After all, being murdered in my own apartment is a boring way to go. You’d have to think of something else.”

“Is that an offer or an order?”

Peter guessed he was just high.

The boy stood up, taking a deep breath to give his brain some oxygen before making a beeline to the kitchen.

“You know what, I’ll just make us some lunch. You’re clearly malnourished.”

He noticed Beck frowning slightly as he reached the counter. “Why is that so?”

“When you lack certain vitamins and nutrients, your brain’s functioning slows down,” Peter retorted, feeling a great satisfaction at the hurt look on Beck’s face. The man obviously hadn’t expected to hear it, and it made the boy even more amused.

He didn’t notice the disappearance of his frequent dark thoughts and when Beck smiled back at him, still crouching next to the armchair, he almost forgot that they were ever even there.

i touch the moon

Chapter Notes

I just want you to know that like 90% of this story is inspired by my precious girlfriend - the mentioned painting is actually her fave! Let's appreciate her! *u*/
(I just fell into the pit of watching Jake's movies and I can't get out. Somebody help me.)
And I want to give y'all a hint - focus on the way Peter's issues change around Quentin. My main goal is to show that development.
Hope y'all are safe and healthy! Lots of love! <333333

Title from "Stalemate" by IO Echo.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Well, it's not that Peter hadn't expected that message from May telling him that she wasn't coming home for the night – he'd been getting them more and more often these days and he sure as hell had gotten used to it by now – but it left a bitter feeling at the tip of his tongue anyway. She barely had time for him now, too engrossed in her charity work and new relationship, and the boy couldn't even blame her. Her work was essential these days and he knew it better than half of the world's population; and then again, he was truly *thrilled* for her and Happy, knowing well that she hadn't been that joyful for years.

But it still hurt, being somewhat abandoned like that. It seemed that growing up stripped him of a piece from every aspect of his life and all he could do was to come to terms with it.

Seeing MJ on his doorstep that afternoon brought him some comfort, at last, as she smiled slightly in her special way that made her look more tired than usual and enveloped him in a loose hug.

“Are you okay?” She asked as soon as they parted, a question clear in her eyes. He nodded and smiled back, much wider and equally exhausted, rushing her inside.

“I'm good,” he answered and honestly, it was finally true. He felt better after the conversation with Beck, after admitting his worries and hearing the man's genuine concern, and even though he still felt drained, the change in the air between him and Beck made his steps just a little lighter.

MJ nodded as well, her shoulder relaxing and gaze sweeping over the apartment. “And he is...?”

“In the bathroom,” he replied quickly and reached up to scratch at the nape of his neck. “You remember the wound I told you about? The one that I thought had killed him? He's taking care of it, changing bandages and shit. He wanted to do it himself.”

“Oh, little miss independent,” she snorted, sarcasm practically dripping from her words to the floor, and Peter laughed quietly under his breath.

“Yeah, at least I don't have to do it.” *Not like he minded. He felt rather uncertain about Beck's abilities to tend to his wound properly, but he definitely wouldn't admit it.*

After a silent moment in which they just stood and looked anywhere but not at each other, Peter pointed at the kitchen with his hand. “Would you like some coffee or I don’t know, hot chocolate? I’m sure I have something.”

“Nah, thanks,” she shook her head and reached to her bag to retrieve another set of hardbound notebooks that she then thrust into his hands. “I gotta go. I’m meeting up with Maggie at five.”

Maggie. He could swear it was the girl from MJ’s art classes, the one that used to wave at her every time they caught each other’s gaze across the corridor, even if it was the tenth time that day, and the one that had given his friend a lovely pastel pink hoodie (a colour that she had absolutely *despised* before) with Monet’s “Water Lilies” embroidered into the fabric that she now wore all the time.

It was quite cute, he had to admit, and made him wish that he had someone like Maggie too.

“Oh,” was his very eloquent response and MJ’s cheeks reddened at that.

“It’s not a *date*,” she mumbled under her breath, looking anywhere but at him, and he already knew.

“I didn’t say anything about it being a date.”

She rolled her eyes, visibly flustered at that and Peter laughed softly. “I think it’s actually kinda sweet. But don’t forget to text me details.”

“You *wish*.”

And with that she was gone, showing him her middle finger on her way out and he shut the door behind her with a grin. He wasn’t going to torment her on that matter, already knowing that if she felt like telling him, she would and there was no other way to make her talk. She was difficult like that and understanding her mechanisms had been a long, long process, but it was worth it. His life was brighter in the moments he could see her.

Having dropped the notebooks she’d brought him, he made a beeline to the bathroom, slowly cracking the door open. He was met with a sight of Beck sitting on the edge of the bathtub this time, shirtless, and trying to secure his neatly wrapped bandages with a half a dozen of small metal fasteners. His baby blue eyes were fixated on his stomach, his bottom lip bit to red and it looked like he’d been working on those fasteners for at least a couple of minutes by now.

“Need help?” Peter asked from the doorway and the corners of his mouth curled up at the surprised look on Beck’s face. The man nodded with defeat.

“Kinda.”

Peter approached him and crouched in front of the bathtub, taking the fasteners from Beck’s and placing them on the bandage with ease. It was quick and smooth, and soon all of them were in the right places – and Peter had to admit that Beck’s wrapping skills weren’t that bad. The bandages looked solid, not too loose and not too tight, and the way they wrapped around the man’s abdomen seemed carefully planned.

“You’re good at this,” the man commented with the same words that were now stuck in the boy’s throat, his eyes following Peter’s fingers as he examined the fasteners and the bandaging itself. The

boy glanced up, startled, and took his hands away.

“I told you, I’ve done this a couple of times before,” he replied and stood up, observing as Beck reached out for his hoodie and put it back on cautiously.

Not a couple of times, exactly. He’d done this dozens, dozens of times alone in his room, barely seeing with his eyes watery from pain, shivering and head dizzy from blood loss. Doing it on someone else under current conditions was actually kind of calming – and he presumably could do this with his eyes shut.

He waited until Beck was ready and standing before leaving the room. They had had their lunch done and eaten a few hours ago and Peter was already feeling his stomach tightening slightly from hunger, but the more he tried to think of making himself some food, the less appetite he felt. A side effect of the Blip, or London, or literally every damn thing that had happened in his life. He tried not to read too much into it as he plopped down on his armchair, MJ’s notebooks laid out in front of him.

“You’re going to study again?” Beck asked from his usual laying spot on the couch, the book from earlier back in his right hand. The other one was playing mindlessly with the cardboard bookmark and Peter found the habit rather unnerving.

“I’ve got a couple of things that I have to get done since I’m not at school,” he replied plainly, reaching for his pen and opening MJ’s geometry notebook. Only now, looking at the stack of other books that laid on the coffee table, he realized that he had forgotten to give the girl the rest of her stuff back and she didn’t even ask him to, and how the hell was she going to take notes in classes?

Ah, Friday. Yeah, there was this day in the week where classes ended and the next day was actually school-free. Wow.

“You should rest for a while,” Beck continued and from the corner of his eye Peter saw that the man’s gaze was still on him. “You can’t work yourself to exhaustion, it’s unhealthy.”

“Yeah, okay. I’ll rest later.”

He tried not to think of the way Beck’s eyes drilled into the side of his head for a minute or so after that, and of the resigned sigh that escaped the man’s mouth.

He *would* rest later, okay? He would.

As it turned out *later*, he *didn’t*.

The only thing that saved him from another argument with Beck was the fact that the man had fallen asleep in the fourth hour, after nearly shouting at Peter to “get some fucking rest”, and the boy could finish his study session in peace. Sure, he was tired and he was sleepy, but he wasn’t going to abandon his work while being halfway into it, okay? Beside being a stubborn ass, he was also a perfectionist.

It was already dark outside when he closed his notebook and looked out of the window. The lights

of the never sleeping city formed a glow that set over the horizon, veiling the first stars, matching the climate of a big metropolis. Since he had been a child, Peter had loved staying up late to observe the flickering lights of the planes flying above Queens, passing by each other on the dark, dark sky that now didn't seem that empty.

Truth be told, a lot of things changed in Peter's life since that spider's bite. Everything, to be precise.

He had just gotten up to straighten his sore back and move his joints a bit when a rustling sound echoed from the couch and Peter saw Beck blinking his eyes open, a pinch of sleepy confusion on his face.

"Where're you goin'?" He asked, voice rough and limbs clumsy as he tried and failed to sit up on the first attempt. The boy smiled subconsciously at that and hadn't noticed his grimace until Beck looked up at him and smiled back.

"Was thinking about taking a shower."

"Not a bad idea."

"You wanna go first or can I?"

Beck shook his head, falling back on the couch with his eyes closed and Peter bit back a laugh. The man seemed like a big baby at times, all sleepy and lumbering, needing to be taken care of. But if that meant he was harmless, Peter wasn't going to make a single complaint.

When he got out of the shower, his hair all wet and messy, wearing the too big white T-shirt with this weird mathematical joke and thick sweatpants, Beck was waiting in the living room. He stood in front of the window with his back to Peter again, this time with clothes in his hands, and hummed some slow melody under his breath. His voice echoed through the empty room, deep and smooth, and although Peter had no idea what the name of the song was, he faintly recalled hearing it at some point of his life.

It wasn't a lullaby, that he knew, but it had the pace of one. The notes were leisure and quiet, bringing peace that swept over the boy and somewhat calmed his nerves, almost hypnotizing him on the spot. He felt nostalgic, though he didn't know the reason, and a shiver ran down his naked arms, making him cross them to warm up a little.

His Peter Tingle rustled when Beck shifted his weight from one foot to another, as he used to, and the boy was reminded that this man had actually tried to *kill him*, and that his body still remembered.

He cleared his throat awkwardly, not exactly knowing what to say and wanting to let the man know of his presence. Beck turned around gustily at the sound, eyes wide and unblinking, and he glanced at the overprint of Peter's shirt before looking up.

Awkward stillness spread over them then, and Peter cleared his throat again. Literally every time neither of them spoke felt uncomfortable and he would've been lying if he'd said that it wasn't tiring sometimes.

"I'll be in May's room," he said finally, gaining Beck's nod before turning around and heading to his Aunt's bedroom. Leaving the man on his own in the apartment still seemed risky, but it wasn't

as if Beck was planning his murder or some shit, right? He'd had more opportunities and left them all untapped, bringing more good than wrong each time despite being Peter's most dangerous enemy.

And in the end, did Peter really care? He sure did not. The only thing he minded was his way of going, because he knew that Tony would've tormented him in the afterlife if his death had been too dumb. To be honest, he felt that Tony would've tormented him because of dying in truly any case.

And you know what? Peter wouldn't have minded.

Because he really missed him.

When he woke up, choking on wet, wet sobs, the clock standing on May's bedside cabinet glimmered with red digits that let him know it was only ten past two. A shaky sigh escaped his lips as he sat up, shivering from coldness of the room, and he had to close his eyes to steady himself a little.

His dream had been... peaceful, for the first time in months. It had been peaceful and tranquil, and domestic, and all he had felt while sleeping was serenity. It almost felt brutal to be woken up, but his body wasn't capable of staying asleep for longer than a few hours without a break and he couldn't even blame it. It truly had been long since his dreams hadn't been bloody.

This one included Tony, of course, but what had changed was that the man hadn't been dying. No, he had been very much alive and healthy, sitting in the living room of his wooden house and smiling, God, smiling so wide and so happy that it had almost hurt to look at him like that. Morgan had been there, too, and Pepper, and Miss Romanoff, and Peter choked on his breath when their smiles from his dream flashed before his eyes. It had seemed so real that he had nearly believed it *had been* real, and the world that he had woken up to suddenly seemed empty.

He felt an urge to go back to sleep, to try and dream that one dream one more time, even if it was the last time. He felt like he *needed* to see all those faces once again to make sure, but as soon as he opened his eyes, he found out that he was scared.

He was scared that it wouldn't come to him again like that. He was scared that the next dream would be worse than all the previous ones, if it was even possible. He was scared that this time he wouldn't wake up and die in his sleep, stuck in the loop of the worst scenarios that his head could muster.

And he didn't want it for himself. God, he really did not.

So he slid off the bed and headed to the door, and then to the kitchen. Having found a random glass, he poured himself tap water and drank it all in one go, trying to wash down the bitter taste left in his mouth. It was cold, so cold that a shiver ran down his arms and legs, and he blinked a handful of times before gaining control of his muscles back.

He didn't want to go to sleep right now. It didn't feel safe. It *never* felt safe, but it had never been this hazardous before.

The boy stood in the middle of the apartment for a minute or so before deciding that checking on Beck wasn't an entirely stupid idea. The man was his enemy, okay? You would want to see if your enemy was up to something.

Yeah, because he would be staying up past two in the morning, planning to murder a person that was a room away, asleep. Truly genius.

The door to his room creaked, as always, and he found himself staring straight at the man that didn't even look like he was sleeping. The sheets were tangled between his legs, the pillows all creased under Beck's head. He was laying on his back, one arm slung over his head and the other clutching the hoodie subconsciously, and he looked as if he had just laid down to rest for a while. His silhouette was sinking in moonlight that fell from the window above the bed and looking at him Peter realized that the man seemed too big to his relatively narrow mattress.

At least he hadn't complained the day before, so Peter wasn't going to bring it up.

When he turned around and made a move to close the door behind himself, he was startled by the rustling of the sheets.

"Peter?"

The boy looked over his shoulder and upon seeing Beck sitting up and slinging his legs from the bed, he turned back on his heel and leaned over the door frame.

"Yeah, it's me."

"Why are you up?" The man asked and then realization dawned up on his face, and his brows furrowed. "A nightmare?"

Peter shook his head. "A good dream, actually. Just— My body isn't used to sleeping too long in one go."

"I see. Aren't you going back to sleep then?"

"I don't want to," he replied, shaking his head again, and bit his lower lip hesitantly. *Sink or swim.* "I'm scared."

At that Beck's frown deepened and his movements stilled halfway through standing up. "You're scared?"

Peter snorted humorlessly. "I know how that sounds — Avengers' Spider-Man is scared even though he went to space and stood face to face with Thanos and—"

"Hey," Beck cut him off, approaching him and halting just a meter or so away, frown still present on his pale face. "You have every right to be scared, Peter. It's okay to be scared. I'm not saying it's not. All I want to ask is what are you scared of?"

The boy looked away, crossing his arms on his chest defensively. He felt *exposed* and *vulnerable*, laid open like a turtle without its shell. He should have *not* said what he'd said.

"I'm scared," he repeated quietly, trying to get over the fear of being truly *seen* as who he was. When he looked up again, Beck's crystal clear eyes pierced through his, even though the room was

dimly lit and the man was barely able to see anything. “I’m scared that I won’t wake up.”

“Why would you not wake up?”

“I could be suffocating, just like last night, and there’s a chance that you wouldn’t hear me screaming.”

Beck’s eyes widened at that, realization even clearer on his face, and his hand instinctively reached out to touch Peter’s bare forearm. It was warm and big, and wrapped around his muscles easily. “But you’re not suffocating. You didn’t suffocate tonight and you’re fine, alright?”

“I’m fine.”

Silence swept over them and this time it wasn’t awkward – it was good. It was calm and harmonious, and helped Beck’s hand to soothe Peter’s anxious shivers that he hadn’t known he had. It almost felt wrong to disturb it.

Beck sighed in the end and it seemed like he had to ground himself. “Do you– Do you want to talk about it? Or something else? Do you have something that you do when you can’t sleep?”

“I– I watch movies,” Peter mumbled under his breath, feeling like a goddamn childish idiot, but Beck didn’t look even slightly amused at his words.

“So let’s watch a movie,” he suggested with a small smile, an honest one, and it seemed as if he truly respected Peter’s coping mechanisms. It felt...

It felt good. And kind of nice.

“Do you want to watch a movie with an eighteen years old kid?” He asked just in case, raising one eyebrow. Beck shrugged, visibly confused at Peter’s disbelief.

“Of course I do. Why wouldn’t I? I was your age once too, you know? Not gonna act like I’m better because I’m older.”

And well, that’s how they ended on the couch in the living room, both of them occupying their own corner with a pillow in their lap and with *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* playing in front of them. The volume was set to be relatively quiet but loud enough for Beck to hear, and it didn’t take Peter long to feel all sleepy again.

Beck, on the other hand, seemed highly entertained and, to be honest, it wasn’t something that Peter had expected.

“You really watch those old-school movies for fun?” The man asked, not taking his eyes off the TV. Peter shrugged even though he knew that the other one couldn’t see him.

“Yeah, I just... They’re kind of relaxing. Science fiction is relaxing in general.”

“I didn’t feel relaxed reading your books, you know. Too much thinking,” the man laughed and hell, even his laugh could sound calm if he wanted. The boy smiled faintly.

“You’d get used to it at one point if you read more.”

“Maybe I will.”

Once again, silence. The only sound was the movie playing in the background and Beck’s steady heartbeat that stood out in the stillness of the room. Peter focused on it, because it was *easy* , because he knew that he would eventually fall asleep to the rhythm.

And it turned out that he did. And as he was slowly drifting off, he heard a rustling sound beside him, yet his Peter Tingle stayed silent and he finally, finally felt *safe* .

He woke up to the slightly brighter sky behind the window and warmth than embraced him like a thick blanket. It turned out that it *was* a thick blanket that hadn’t been there before, and he was tucked in like a toddler in the same position that he had fell asleep – with his knees drawn to his chest and head leaning over the back of the couch. As he blinked his eyes open, he noticed that the man was still up, his arms crossed on his chest and gaze fixated on the TV screen.

“Quentin?” He muttered, barely managing to stay awake, and he noted the way Beck’s eyes flickered to him with surprise in them. “What’re you doing?”

“I’m watching a movie.”

Peter glanced to the side and his sleepy brain realized that it wasn’t the same movie as before. “Is this part two?”

“Yeah, I kind of. Found myself caught up in the plot. You mind that I’m watching without you?”

“Nah,” the boy shook his head and looked back at the man. He was still watching him, piercing him with those pale blue eyes. “But you know that you can go to sleep?”

The man nodded without a word and Peter found himself smiling softly. Beck was a *stubborn ass* , and it was the first thing that they had in common.

“Do whatever you want,” he replied, but there was no malice behind his words and Quentin sent him a small smile back before focusing on the movie.

And Peter didn’t even notice that he instinctively searched for Beck’s heartbeat in the quiet room, and that it kind of felt like a lullaby at this point.

And he was asleep in less than a minute.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, MJ is going to have some romance she deserves!

a storm to weather

Chapter Notes

I'm not happy with how the chapter turned out in the end, but hey, I needed to get the point through. Peter's issues are serious and I'm sorry if you started reading this story in hopes for light stuff. But it's not gonna be tough all the way from the beginning to the end. There is gonna be some change in Peter's mental health, so stay tuned! (I had to include the pockets, okay? I can't believe Peter, Gen Z, wouldn't want some pockets in his suit. It's ridiculous.)

Title from "Before you go" by Lewis Capaldi.

WARNING: PTSD, PANIC ATTACK, PASSING OUT DUE TO PANIC

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Waking up to the sound of soft snores and steady breathing was brand new to Peter, to say the least, but it somehow felt... *right*.

As soon as he opened his eyes, he was partly blinded by the beams of sunlight falling through the thick glass of the window and he had to squint to make out his surroundings. The first thing he noticed was that his legs weren't drawn to his chest anymore – instead, they were lying across the couch and as his gaze followed them, he noted that his feet were tucked between Beck's spine and the back of the furniture. They felt *warm* and when he focused enough on the feeling, he could sense the mild movements of Beck's body, caused by his even breathing.

As much as Peter didn't want to admit it, it was soothing, to be touching another person in such a simple way. And to his surprise, it didn't even feel this awkward, no – it felt rather normal. The blanket was still wrapped around his body, ending just above his ankles due to the fact that he was clutching most of the fabric tightly to his chest, and now he had a cushion under his head that also hadn't been there when he had dozed off. He knew, deep down, that it was Beck's doing and the thought brought some warmth to his chest even though he *definitely* didn't want it.

The man, on the contrary, was still sitting on the couch in the exact same position, only with one difference – his feet were propped up on the coffee table, seemingly more comfortable. His arms were crossed on his chest, head leaning over the back of the couch and he seemed to be drowning in the folds of the hoodie, fast asleep, loud breathing interrupted by a low snore from time to time. His heartbeat was steady and strong, and although the sheer sound caused Peter to think of Tony – of his heart that had stopped beating in one second, sudden, *without warning* – he felt an unknown desire to match his own heartbeat to it.

It felt so cozy, so warm and soft, and most importantly *peaceful* that Peter didn't even try to wake the other man up. He simply closed his eyes and hid his hands from the cold air of the room under the blanket, releasing a long, long breath of relief.

His sleep had been dreamless again, black and silent and making him wake up well-rested, and it almost felt humiliating to know the reason. The presence of another person, so close and so *real*, the warmth and the heartbeat, the overwhelming feeling of *safety* that had washed over him as he

had been slowly drifting off – it wasn't wrong and it wasn't anything bad for sure.

Trouble began with the name *Beck* – because *he* was the one that had made Peter feel this way. *He* made him feel protected, *he* made him feel taken care of and *he* eased his mind enough to let him sleep for so long. The realization brought shame to Peter's chest, made it blossom there hot and itching, because it wasn't what Tony would have wanted. He would've wanted Peter to *be safe* and not only feel like that.

Because Beck didn't *make* him safe, right?

The train of his thoughts was disrupted by a rapid shudder coming from the man's direction, his heartbeat and the pace of his breath quickening. It looked like he was waking up, finally, because judging by the clock hanging on the living room's wall it was well past nine and Peter was surely *not* used to sleeping anywhere past seven at this point.

And then it got through to him: *Beck was waking up*. And hell if Peter was going to let him see how comfortable he had made himself against him.

The boy drew his feet back, as gently as possible, and sat up to slide his legs off the couch. The blanket rustled loudly, but the noise wasn't enough to awaken the man, and so Peter got up from his spot, abandoning the fabric carelessly and making his way to the kitchen. Only there, leaning over the fridge and clasping a hand over his chest, he realized how fast and anxious his heartbeat had been.

I'm fucking ridiculous, he thought and took a deep breath, glancing at the back of Beck's head. His hair was even more messy than when he'd woken the man up previously and definitely needed a hairdresser, but hey, Peter wasn't going to let him wander in the streets right now. Maybe he could cut the man's hair himself instead – his hands were steady and to be honest, how much could he worsen its state?

Beck stirred again, visibly coming to his senses and startling Peter. The boy turned around in order to put the kettle on the stove, his heartbeat still racing, and snorted under his breath with a frown forming on his face. His life had become a shitshow in less than four days and he had a feeling that if Tony could see him now – God, *please*, don't make it possible – he'd give him so much shit for it.

While the water was slowly warming up, he took to making some breakfast that wasn't cereal with milk this time. He was starving and although the thought of eating still felt a little unpleasant, his stomach was rumbling like a thunder and he knew that he *really* needed to eat something nutritious. Beside Beck was still weakened by the wound, even if it was healing quite well, and he had to eat something more than empty carbohydrates and sugar.

By the time the fried eggs and sandwiches were ready, Peter saw Beck let out a low groan and stretch his arms above his head lazily. The man looked slightly confused at the sight of the empty spot beside him, but when he looked over his shoulder and their eyes locked, his bewilderment was replaced by a soft, soft smile that made the wrinkles around his eyes visible.

"Hi," he said in that hoarse voice that didn't sound a bit like Europe. "You up long?"

Peter shrugged, scraping the eggs onto two separate plates. "Ten minutes or something."

Beck answered with a quiet hum, getting up and stretching again. Peter could swear that he heard

his spine pop this time and honestly, seeing the discomfort that spread over the man's face made him smile with a dash of amusement.

"How did you sleep?"

Peter lifted his gaze up from the pan to look at Beck. He stood in the middle of the living room, waiting for the answer, and the boy cleared his throat awkwardly. "Not bad, I think. Didn't dream anymore, so."

Beck nodded, his features softening a little and again, he didn't look a thing like Europe. "That's good, I guess."

"Yeah, I guess."

It was kind of sticky, talking with Beck about this night. They both knew that it was all thanks to the man that Peter had slept *at all* after his dream, not to mention how good he'd slept, but saying it out loud seemed embarrassing. To Peter at least, because he had a feeling that Beck would be quite smug about it.

And he'd had enough of Beck's self-confidence.

Their breakfast disappeared rather quickly and by the time Peter was done with washing the dishes, the man had changed into his jeans and the same T-shirt with Phasma printed on the front. It made Peter think that maybe it was about time he should give Beck some other shirt to wear, but something else caught his attention.

"How's the wound?" He asked cautiously, watching the other's face as he sat down. There was no wince, no sign of discomfort, yet he knew that it was better safe than sorry. Beck looked up at him from the couch and stopped halfway through folding Peter's discarded blanket.

"It doesn't hurt," he replied after a second hesitantly, obviously focusing on the injury to check for pain. His eyes flickered from the blanket to Peter. "I feel it when I move, but it's better."

"The infection must have weakened. Your bandages probably need to be changed," the boy reminded and bit his lower lip, dropping the kitchen cloth he'd been holding on the counter. "Do you want me to do it or..."

"I'll do it. Have to be a grown ass man, right?"

And that's how half an hour or more later Peter ended alone in the living room, sitting on the edge of the coffee table and bobbing his leg anxiously. He was listening to the sounds coming from the bathroom, trying to decipher if the noises were something to worry about, if they held too much pain, but found that he couldn't really focus on the task.

His thoughts kept floating to the Spider-Man suit hidden in one of May's drawers, folded cautiously and with E.D.I.T.H. glasses placed on the top. It had been a long time since he'd gone out on patrol – the last time being Tuesday night before Beck's arrival – and he was wondering if people had started to feel uneasy. It would always happen eventually when he would neglect his

responsibilities as a hero and not appear for longer than three nights in a row (Twitter would literally explode with worried posts and comments at this point), and he would've lied saying that he didn't mind it.

He minded, a lot actually. His goal wasn't to make people worry and definitely not about him. He wanted to *protect* them, not burden.

He was overthinking, he knew, and he also knew that he shouldn't be doing it. It always brought him more problems than there even were in reality. *Fuck it*, he thought and made a quick beeline to May's room.

Slipping into the suit felt so familiar that it instantly made him feel better, made him feel *at home*. He kept his face uncovered for now, clutching the mask in his left hand and hiding the glasses in one of the small convenient pockets on the bottom of his back. He remember not having any space to put his stuff in his first suits and being so irritated that it was the first thing he'd made sure his newest costume would have. And it was hell to think of the spots where the pockets should be, and how they should be hidden and functioning at the same time, but hey, he wasn't all that bad at thinking, right? He managed.

Beck's eyes widened when Peter slipped into the bathroom, bandaging quickly forgotten. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going on patrol," he replied simply and cast a look on the man's stomach. The wound looked normal, not red or glossy anymore, and the stitches seemed intact. Apparently Beck's body was still healthy enough after the last two weeks, enabling his muscles to heal quite quickly and saving himself a visit in hospital. "I'm leaving you here alone, because I have better things to do than watch over a grown ass man do nothing, and I hope you won't do anything stupid. You know I will call Fury and he's not gonna be as nice as me."

Beck put his hands up, an amused smile dancing on his lips. "I won't do shit, I promise. Your aunt is enough. No need to alarm Fury as well."

Peter nodded, finding it hard to fight off a smile that was making its way onto his face. He really shouldn't be all smiley and happy now – he had a man to intimidate, okay?

"I don't know when I'll be back. I'm planning on making my usual rounds around the neighbourhood and a few streets beyond that, but I can't say for sure that I won't stumble upon some shit on my way."

"No need to hurry. It's not like I can do much with this thing," he motioned to the wound and shrugged. "Is your aunt coming or something? Should I hide?"

Okay, at that he couldn't *not* smile. "She hasn't texted me or anything and she usually does when she's coming back. If so, she's the only person who has the keys so if you hear the lock, you better run."

"Will do," Beck replied, shooting him a smile back. Peter glanced at the aid kit sitting on the tiles next to the man's feet, the wound again and then back at Beck's face. He tightened his hold on the mask.

"I'll be going. Just– Please, don't do shit and don't piss off May. You can watch some movies or something. See you soon."

And with that he was gone, back in May's room and slipping outside through her window, shutting it behind himself. The air was crisp, not too cold and not exactly warm, but it wasn't an issue for his heated suit. He took a deep, deep breath and made an experimental shot with his web before jumping from the building's wall.

It felt refreshing, to be able to jump around the neighbourhood so effortlessly like before and he found out that he'd really missed it. He missed this feeling of *freedom*, of independence that swinging around Queens yielded, the air smacking against the fabric of his suit, the smiles that his silhouette caused on people's faces. Some of them waved at him and he couldn't stop himself from waving back – maybe he didn't really like crowds, but truth be told, he couldn't go on for long without making sure that all those people were safe. It had stopped being only his duty some time ago – it was something he just *liked* doing. It made him feel needful.

It made him feel *alive*.

He swung by the newest Iron Man graffiti without stopping – he casted a quick look on it, noting the vivid colours and clear lines before turning around the corner. The thought of landing to admire the piece of art felt wrong, exhausting, and he knew that it would end in him bawling his eyes out there and then. He was doing so good today though; he wanted to enjoy having a better day, finally.

It all went so well for the first two or so hours – he'd headed farther, deeper into Queens, mostly just swinging from one building to the other and not stopping, but as soon as he saw a little blond girl in a tiny Spider-Man T-shirt waving at him from the side of the road, he felt something tug at his heart. He landed cautiously in front of her, careful not to harm her, and straightened his back.

"Hello!" He said, as cheerful as possible, and waved back, smiling underneath his mask at the sight of her mouth forming a perfect 'o'. The girl's dad looked at him with almost equal shock, his grip apparently loosening on his daughter's small hand, because as soon as Peter dropped his arm, she hurried up to him. Her thin limbs squeezed around his legs with more force than he'd expected, making him *oof* silently.

"I'm sorry for my daughter," the girl's dad said as soon as he recovered, rushing up to crouch beside the girl. He sent Peter an apologetic smile. "Lilly just really loves you."

"And I want to be a Spider-Man too when I grow up!" The girl, Lilly, exclaimed from the level of his thighs. Peter's smile faltered with something painful blooming in his chest at the sight.

"Don't be sorry, she didn't do anything wrong," he said, looking at the man, and crouched as well. People were having trouble passing by them as they took quite a big part of the pavement, but not many of them complained. Peter heard a few snapshots, instantly letting him know that Twitter had already informed the world of his comeback.

He looked back at Lilly, her overjoyed smile seemingly blinding him. "I'm sure you will make a wonderful Spider-Man, Lilly. Can I ask how old are you?"

"Six!" She declared proudly, straightening up and raising her head. "I'm turning seven in a week!"

"Early happy birthday to you, then," Peter replied, a wide, wide smile back on his face. Glancing at the man, he felt that strange, strong sting inside of him again and now he had an idea what it could be.

He just. He missed Tony. A lot. It felt like a lifetime since he had last looked at him like Lilly could look at her dad and it wasn't fair.

"Lilly, can you show Mr. Spider-Man the drawing--"

Then his Peter Tingle stirred. It was mild at first, and he thought that he had enough time to look around, but then his sixth sense screamed loudly in his head and the only thing he could think about was Lilly.

He grabbed the girl, pressing her tightly to his chest and rolling around to catch her startled dad as well, landing against the building wall with both of them in his hands. He put very scared, very tearful Lilly in the man's lap just in time to hear a gunshot pierce through the air.

And then, it was all panic.

People started running around, screaming, pushing each other and kicking with their heavy boots and high heels, and honestly, Peter needed a second to get over his initial shock before locating the source of the gunshot. When he found it – a little store around the corner, its glass shop window in pieces and the owner standing in panic behind the counter – another gunshot echoed through the street, and Peter saw him.

There was only one guy, not a group of them, and he didn't even have a mask. He stood in the middle of the shop, his face all red and veins standing out against his sweaty skin, this time his gun aimed at the owner. Peter knew that if it fired, the older man would be dead.

It was all his instincts.

He shot his web at the gun, gluing it to the criminal's hands and preventing it from firing, before swinging inside the store. He shot another web, this time at the guy's legs and it looked solid. It was fine.

Until it wasn't. The first web wasn't enough and the man fired, missing just a few inches from Peter's head – and then he was back there.

A hand clasped around Beck's wrist and the man's face painted with shock. A gunshot ringing in his ears. His own blood dripping down his face. Sore muscles. Reddened eyes. Guilt, anger, regret.

"You can't trick me anymore."

The next thing he knew was the store owner hugging him, crying, sobbing something about owing him his life and giving him sweets as the only thank-you he could afford. He lifted his arms automatically and wrapped them around the elderly man's back, not even fully comprehending the policemen that were securing the place.

"I'm so sorry that you had to see this, boy," the owner whispered into his ear and that made Peter recover. He pushed the shaken man off gently to look at him.

"That's my job, sir. I'm used to it," he replied and smiled weakly underneath his mask, although he knew that the man couldn't see it. Still, it made him feel a little more stable. It made him feel like he could at least *pretend* to be sane.

Because he definitely *wasn't* sane. His limbs felt shaky on his way home, his mind still buzzing with adrenaline and no matter how much he wanted to, he couldn't make himself stop on some roof to breathe. He *couldn't*. The sun was shining brightly, nearly blinding him, and the only reason he didn't crash with any building was his Peter Tingle.

God, he was such a fuckup.

By the time he reached May's room, he could barely see due to the amount of tears in his eyes. He stumbled through the window and then the door, stepping into the living room with the mask in his hand. Beck was laying on the couch as usual, his hair *still messy*, Peter's T-shirt on and his stupid fucking book in his hands.

He didn't look a thing like Europe, not with this concern on his face and his strong arms coming to wrap themselves around the shaking boy, not with the gentle way he held Peter, not with this low voice that tried to soothe him with those quiet words. He *was* Quentin Beck and at the same time he *wasn't* Quentin Beck that Peter had used to know and it was *too much*.

He forgot how to breathe and he couldn't hear, and though he wanted to stay awake to actually *listen* to the man, knowing that it was the only thing that could ease his panic, that could help him *breathe*, he couldn't.

The last thing that he felt wasn't the burning in his lungs, no. It was the warmth of Beck's hands on his face and honestly, it wasn't that bad. He wished the feeling would stay.

His Peter Tingle didn't even scream anymore as he drifted off, suddenly, and it was dark.

Chapter End Notes

[A little reminder that there's a playlist for this fic!](#) It's being updated once in a while.

in the in-between

Chapter Notes

Okay, frick. I just wrote over 6k words in three days and that's probably my biggest achievement ever, and I'm kinda proud of myself? I really really really hope you'll like this chapter, 'cause it was fun to write and I had to physically stop myself at some point, and I just fangirled myself at what I was writing? Am I even sane yet? Anyway, have those angsty boys with feelings.

Title from "yes & no" by XYLO.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Do you think I should wear a pink or yellow tie? Morgana’s favourite colour is pink, but Pepper’s dress for tonight is pastel yellow and I don’t know which match is better.”

“What about this one with stripes? The pastel one?”

“The one Pepper bought me for Christmas last year? Nah, it’s too wide for this shirt.”

“But it would correspond with them both.”

Tony looked at him with his hands on his hips, mouth in thin line. His hair was precisely styled, grayish beard freshly trimmed and creamy shirt tightly tucked into his navy blue trousers. Peter knew that it took the man’s entire strong will not to cross his arms as he used to when he was annoyed – it would crease the shirt and Tony had had enough of ironing for the night.

“It’s too wide,” Tony groaned, taking the said tie from the drawer. It was carefully rolled and girded with a narrow leather ribbon, and when the man unpacked it, Peter bit his lower lip in musing.

Well, it was too wide, but if Tony kept his jacket buttoned, it wouldn’t stick out too much. The thing was he knew that the man would never keep his jacket buttoned unless Pepper tormented him about it, and so they were back to square one with two ties in two different colours.

“Maybe yellow?” He suggested, glancing at the mentioned tie that laid in his lap. “You could take a pastel pink pocket square so Morgan would have her colour.”

At that, Tony’s eyes widened and he smiled widely, snatching the tie from Peter’s lap and ruffling his hair. “You’re a genius, kid! They’re going to love it.”

The boy smiled slightly, proud with himself, and took to rolling the other tie left in his lap. Halfway through tying a bow with its ribbon he glanced up to see Tony staring at him in the mirror. He was standing with his back to the boy and had his hands on the tie, a frown on his face.

“Are you okay, Peter?” He asked, concern dripping from his words. Peter furrowed his brows, taken-aback, and something in his chest squeezed around his heart.

“I’m fine, why? Is something wrong?”

Tony turned around on his heel, coming to stand right in front of Peter with the yellow tie hanging from his neck quickly forgotten. His eyes seemed glossy and his hands shook when he put them in the deep pockets of his trousers.

“You know that I’m proud of you, Peter, right? And I always was and always will be?” He asked hesitantly, not taking his eyes off the boy. It was disquieting, to say the least.

Peter nodded slowly, his frown deepening. “Yeah, Tony. I-I do. But why—”

“You have to go,” Tony cut him off with a tired, tired sigh. “I think there’s someone waiting for you.”

He didn’t understand. Peter didn’t understand, and he stood up, wanting to reach out, to hug Tony and tell him that he didn’t need to be anywhere and there was no one waiting for him, and—

He felt heavy fingers wrapped around his hand, warmth spreading from them all around his chest, and a shallow breathing right next to his ear. There was a blanket around him again – no, not a blanket, those were his sheets and his soft bed, and everything smelled differently. The breathing was interrupted by a long, long sigh and when Peter looked to the side, he saw Beck sitting on the floor. He had his chest leaning over the side of the bed, his eyelids closed but eyes moving rapidly underneath them, and his head was placed against Peter’s shoulder on the mattress.

Peter blinked, dazed from the sight and from the dream, and he felt a tear roll down his cheek. Judging by the wetness gathered on his face, it wasn’t the first one. *Just great, crybaby.* He still had his Spider-Man suit on and to be honest, it wasn’t the most comfortable piece of clothing to wear to bed. His spine popped quietly when he fidgeted a little to give his back some rest, and Beck’s head snapped up at the sound.

“Peter?” He whispered, eyes somewhat glassy as they locked with the boy’s. His fingers around Peter’s hand tightened their hold and he winced slightly. The man was *strong*, okay? And his nerves were *fine*.

Peter nodded, not exactly knowing what to say. Beck looked more shaken than himself and it was just. It was weird. He had no fucking right to be worried.

But he was, wasn’t he? He’d been worrying about him since day one.

“I had no idea what to do,” Beck admitted, gaze flying to the wall opposite from him. “You came in and you didn’t hear a word I said, did you? I tried to help you, but you didn’t hear, and then you passed out and I thought you were injured and—”

“Beck?” Peter cut him off as soon as he noted the trembling of his hand. The man’s stare snapped back to him. “I’m fine, okay? I’m here and I’m fine.”

Beck nodded, but didn’t look a bit convinced. “Has it happened before?”

Peter frowned at the question. He’d passed out more than once – from blood loss, from exhaustion. Once or twice even from the stress related to the countless injuries he’d had (and he wasn’t quite proud of that, yeah), but when he really thought about it, he’d always been hurt physically. And today he definitely *wasn’t*.

“No,” he admitted after a second and dropped his gaze to Phasma on Beck’s T-shirt. Her helm was creased with the fabric, a coffee stain on her left eye, and it was still easier to stare at the brownish pattern than at the man. He saw Beck’s chest move with a sigh.

“You can call me Quentin, you know,” he mumbled, immediately drawing Peter’s attention back. His neck snapped like he was about to get a whiplash, but the small smile on Beck’s face successfully distracted him from pain.

“What?”

“I don’t see why you shouldn’t call me by my first name. It’s not like I’m that much older than you.”

“No more Mysterio?” Peter snorted, the painful feeling in his chest loosening. He closed his eyes and smiled slightly, feeling Quentin’s fingers finally relax against his hand.

“No more Mysterio. You killed him on that bridge.”

Peter shook his head gently. This man was unbearable with those poetic metaphors and shitty attempts at sounding like a wise person. Hey, even if he *did* succeed, sometimes, it was still shitty. But it was good to hear that he was no more Mysterio; even in his own head.

And as if the man read his thoughts, he heard Quentin breathe out slowly, steadily, his thumb stroking circles on the back of Peter’s hand. “You bet he’s not coming back.”

It was barely five in the afternoon when Peter clambered out of his bed, changed into his sweatpants and a random T-shirt, and stepped into the kitchen. His nose was instantly filled with the smell of freshly brewed tea that had been waiting for him in a mug on the counter, and he let himself smile a little.

“I don’t drink tea,” Quentin admitted with his elbows on the countertop, leaning over it from the living room side. “And I have no idea how to make it taste... nice. I just hope my improvisation doesn’t kill you.”

Peter waved a hand at him, picking the mug and inhaling the refreshing scent of his favourite Earl Grey. “Doubt you made it that bad. If so, you could always learn, you know. Practice makes perfect.”

In the corner of his eye, he caught a smirk appearing on the man’s face. “Guess that if I have to obediently stay down here, I could learn something useful as well.”

“I won’t lie, I’d appreciate you cooking instead of me. I do it all the time.”

“Whoa, whoa, slow down, rodeo. We don’t want you to have fucking food poisoning because I can’t boil an egg properly.”

Peter snorted at that, glancing at Quentin with a raised eyebrow. “Don’t tell me you can’t cook

like. Anything.”

The man looked to the side, suddenly so caught up with the texture of the painted wall. “I may be having some problems, sometimes.”

“So you’re a fucking technology genius and you can’t cook shit? Do you know how straight up ridiculous it sounds?”

“Not everyone is Gordon Ramsay, okay? Cooking utensils don’t like me and I don’t like them back. It’s simple.”

Peter tried to hold back his laughter, he truly *did*, alright? But the whole situation was *so* fucking hilarious and unbelievable that he burst out laughing – for the first time in weeks. And before he could take control of it, Beck was already staring at him like he’d seen a ghost.

“What?” The boy choked out, reaching up to wipe his eyes with his free hand. Quentin shrugged slightly and something in his face shifted, softened. He smiled gently, like this morning, looking like an entirely different person than Mysterio and *God*, Peter really didn’t know what was real anymore.

“Are you bullying me because I can’t cook?”

Well, Peter hadn’t expected this to come out of Quentin’s mouth. Shit, he didn’t even know what was so funny, but it felt good, it was good to laugh again like there was no tomorrow and the world wasn’t such a fucked up place for him.

“You deserve it, you untalented fish.”

“Really, a *fish*? That’s all you have?”

“Listen, I’m not the guy who had a fucking fishbowl on his head, okay? Don’t tell me you did it for looks.”

At that, Quentin looked truly offended. He put his hand on his chest in a dramatic gesture, and Peter shook his head, laughter still lingering on his lips. Apparently Beck was an equally huge drama queen as him and May.

“Are you questioning my *taste*?”

“You better ask me what I’m *not* questioning in you.”

It seemed to have shut the man up – his eyes widened, a grin creeping up on his face and his hand dropping down in artificial shock. “I was fucking right,” he said, shaking his head slowly, crystal blue irises never leaving Peter. The boy raised his eyebrows with amusement.

“About what?”

“You’re something else, kid.”

Peter looked down at that, staring at the dark steaming liquid in his mug. He felt the hair on the nape of his neck standing up and a soft, soft blush spread out on his freckled cheeks, and God, was he really flustered by that? It could be barely called a compliment.

“Thanks,” he replied, just in case.

Just in case what? Just in case he’s flirting with you? You better take your head back from these clouds, ‘cause he’s not a good match.

“You’re welcome,” came the reply alongside with a smile that was far too tender to be called nice. Peter dropped his gaze back to the mug, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

Was he already picking up Beck’s habits?

The said man cleared his throat. “I’m not sure it’s the best moment, but at the same time I know that there isn’t really a good moment for this, so. I’m just gonna go with this,” he murmured and Peter frowned at that. “What happened before? Before you came in, I mean.”

The boy sighed heavily, feeling the exhaustion caused by the sheer question settle in his bones. “Can we sit down for this?”

“Sure.”

And so they did, taking their previous spots on the couch – Peter in one corner, Quentin in the other and even though there was an unspoken anxiety in the air now, something else had changed too. They sat closer this time, with Peter’s knee touching the man’s thigh as he crossed his legs. The mug had warmed up the boy’s hands enough to let him relax against the cushions without a blanket, but he still needed a moment to breathe before speaking up; it looked like Beck didn’t mind.

“There was a gunfight at some store. Well, not exactly a literal gunfight, just one guy with a gun who tried to shoot the owner of the shop and fired a couple of times at the walls and windows. I tried to disarm him, but my web missed and he– he fired right next to my head,” he explained, throat tightening with stress. His knuckles whitened with the force he’d been clutching the mug. “And it all went downhill from this. I was back at that bridge, with you and your gun, and when I came here I saw you laying here and–”

“You thought I’m going to do that again?” Quentin asked and hell, there was sincere concern in his words, but Peter shook his head.

“I just thought that I don’t understand, you know? I still don’t,” he said, locking eyes with Beck. “Like, you don’t *look* the same as you did in Europe, but you’re still *you* and at the same time you’re not Quentin Beck from London, and... It’s too much.”

Beck nodded, musing. “You mean I’m not me from London–”

“You’re kind,” Peter cut him off, feeling impatient and angry at himself. *He was so stupid.* “You’re so nice for me and you seem to care about me, sometimes? And fuck, you’re shy. Mysterio *isn’t* shy and awkward, and yet you are, and I don’t get it. What has fucking changed?”

At that, Quentin shrugged, his gaze suddenly flying away. He worried his lower lip between his teeth, frowning, and Peter waited. He had time.

“I want to explain this, Peter, but I’m afraid that I don’t know the answer myself.”

“*Bullshit*. You know. Why are you helping me when it was meant the other way around? Why are you nice? Why the fuck do you *care*?”

His frown deepened, the rage inside him suddenly directed at Beck and not himself. He wanted to know, okay? He had all the rights to know – it was his house and his own life. If he was being played with again, he’d prefer to know.

Quentin looked back at him coyly. There was something new in his eyes, something quizzical again, and Peter had had fucking enough of his games. He was ready to burst out once more, yell at the man, *hit him* if he didn’t offer him some explanations.

He was *tired* of his life being so fucking complicated. He wanted something simple, at least once.

“Peter, listen,” the man sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. He sounded equally exhausted. “I don’t know what has changed since Europe. I don’t even know what has changed since that first day on your doorstep, okay? I just don’t want you to be hurt again, do you understand? Don’t make me think more about that.”

It was enough, really, for Peter. He would’ve lied saying that the first answer hadn’t shocked him, yet he was ready to know more. He *needed* to know more.

It was the only thing he deserved. The truth.

“If you’re playing games with me again, just tell me. It’ll spare us some more fighting.”

“I’m not playing games with you,” Quentin spit out angrily, suddenly looking at him with force in his eyes. “I thought I’ve made it clear by now.”

“Then *what* do you want?” Peter asked and Beck must have sensed the complete lack of energy in his voice, because his shoulders sagged and he looked sort of... Apologetic?

He took a deep, deep breath and his bright, usually so rich eyes dimmed. “I don’t know yet. Let me figure it out. The only thing I know now is that I want you to be safe. And I’m sorry for making you the way you are.”

Peter nodded silently, pretending that he was fine. He was okay, he really was.

His hands shook when he tried and failed to keep the mug steady in his grip. He felt the blush paling, his throat tightening again.

Okay, maybe he wasn’t.

Because Quentin-fucking-*Mysterio*-Beck just admitted to be caring about him and he didn’t know how he should feel about it. He tried to ignore the funny feeling that had settled in his chest and swallowed down the bump stuck just behind his tongue.

And then his phone rang. He looked at the man, and then at the device laying on the coffee table. May’s name shone from the screen alongside with her selfie that she’d taken when he had been in Europe and sent him right then and there, and he felt something warm spill inside his stomach when he heard her cheerful voice through the speaker.

“Hi, honey! How are you doing? I just saw the posts on Twitter, are you okay?”

“Yeah, May,” he nodded although he knew that she couldn’t see it. “I’m alright,” he replied, glancing at Quentin who still had his bottom lip between his teeth.

“That’s so good to hear. And I’m so proud of you, Peter! Not only for stopping this man, but for convincing yourself to go out.”

He smiled, closing his eyes for a moment. It was nice to hear that, actually. No matter how bad it sounded, he still needed some words of praise sometimes. It helped him going. He opened his mouth to answer, but May was faster.

“I’ll be coming home with Happy in an hour, is that okay? I wanted to let you know in case you wanted to take a shower.”

Great again. That’s what he really needs right now. Angry Happy Hogan.

“It’s okay,” he lied, and sighed.

“Oh, that’s good, we’ll be home soon! Love you, honey.”

“Love you too.”

The line was silent after that. And don’t get him wrong, he was really happy that she still called him and he appreciated this, but he knew that she did it mostly out of habit at this point. She loved him, yes, cared for him. But she had too many new things in her life that were more fun than him, and he couldn’t blame her for replacing spending time with him for something better.

To be honest, he’d do the same to himself.

He sighed, getting up from the couch and making Quentin hum with a frown. “Where are you going now?”

Peter turned to look at him, not even trying to hide the exhaustion. Beck knew him quite well by now.

“I’m going to take a shower and make myself look presentable. May’s coming home with Happy.”

“With *who*?”

He rolled his eyes. “Her boyfriend, Tony’s best friend. The guy from the plane? Any bells?”

Quentin sighed at the last description and wiped a hand across his face. “Should I get ready for another thunderstorm?”

“You better,” he replied and reached up to point a finger at the other man. “We’re going to talk about it later,” he threatened.

And with that he was gone, leaving the man alone to his thoughts and trailing to his room for some fresh clothes, head heavy with Beck’s words. He didn’t even want to talk again himself, but he knew that at this point the things shouldn’t be left alone to themselves. If he’d already touched the subject, they had to finish. There was no other option.

But something told him that it didn't make things any easier.

Chapter End Notes

Guys, I can't describe how much I love you all. You've been keeping me motivated since the first days when I was still worried if people are going to like this story and now? I'm in literal tears every time I see this number next to my inbox pop up. All the love for you! <333

(Don't forget to love my girlfriend **flares_09** with me! She's the main reason I started writing this <333)

no one's heroic

Chapter Notes

I'm shitty at being consistent, am I? Sorry for being absent for so long, I had a shitton of school work to do.

And I'm really sorry for giving you such an awful chapter - I don't even know what went wrong, but it feels like I didn't feel the flow? It's so rough??? But I had to finish it now or never and I really don't want to abandon this piece. It's too precious, and you guys are too precious to me as well :c <3

I hope y'all are safe and healthy, and I'm sending you all my support and love! (And I promise the next chapter will be better!)

Title from "1-800-273-8255" by Logic ft. Alessia Cara, Khalid.

Having taken that *damn* shower, styled his hair with a pinch of hair paste and put on some washed clothes, Peter decided that he really could look at least slightly acceptable if he wanted and had enough motivation to try. Yeah, *motivation*, that was something that he'd been lacking for the last months, he thought to himself as he buttoned up his yellow flannel shirt in front of the bathroom mirror.

The clock struck forty-something minutes since May's call when Peter entered the living room, locking eyes with Quentin who looked *slightly* more than just nervous. He seemed to have been pacing around the room for the last couple of minutes, at least, his hands on his hips and another T-shirt hugging his upper body – this time it was a white one with the words LOGIC printed on the front.

The boy came to a halt next to the couch, observing him. "What's going on? Don't tell me you're this edgy because of Happy," he half-joked, a corner of his mouth twitching upwards at the startled look on Beck's face. The man sighed heavily and stopped his pacing as well, moving his hands to hide them in the back pockets of his jeans.

"The things I said earlier... I meant them, Peter," he said in a serious tone that made Peter's insides twist uncomfortably. He *hated* this note – it made Quentin's voice no longer soothing, no longer warm and consoling. He squeezed his lips into a thin line.

"Let's just leave it for now."

"I meant every single thing I said," Beck repeated stubbornly, moving a step forward. "I *am* sorry for dropping more trauma on you."

And that was it, and then silence. Peter had expected something more – more explanations, more nonsense, *anything* – but it turned out Quentin had learned that it was to no avail when it came to him.

He nodded stiffly, eyes never leaving the man. "It doesn't change a thing, but. Understood."

Beck nodded back and furrowed his brows slightly, something akin to a smile forming on his face.

It looked like maybe he wanted to speak out, add something unnecessary, but then the lock in the front door rattled, making Peter glance sharply towards it.

Ah, yes. Couldn't wait.

His gaze flew back to Quentin who still had his eyes fixated on Peter – intent and soft once again, and holding so much curiosity. It was so fucking weird to be given so much attention for the first time in his life, to be listened to and cared for, and the boy had eventually started to feel slightly overwhelmed. But *hell* if it wasn't nice.

“Don't speak unless they ask you to, okay? And even then, please, try not to talk shit.”

“Got it,” the man replied, an almost childish smile making its way onto his face and Peter was sure that he wasn't just physically capable of *not* smiling back at him anymore.

God, it was stupid. It felt like that beginning of his crush on MJ and hell, he really didn't need another burden in the form of warm feelings for his, let's not forget this part, *enemy*.

The door gave in and opened, revealing May's blinding smile. She was dressed in one of her airy floral shirt and her favourite jeans dungarees that she'd bought on her trip to California not that long ago – it had later turned out that it wasn't technically her who had bought them, but Happy, and she'd only chosen the style. To be honest, Peter was certain that there was much more about her and Hogan he didn't know yet, however at this point he wasn't sure if he wanted to.

“My baby boy!” She exclaimed from the doorstep and threw her arms up, quickly approaching Peter to envelop him in a tight, tight hug. She smelled flowery, he realized as he stuck his nose into her neck, and it kinda fit her outfit.

“Hey, May,” he replied as gentle as possible, letting her know that it was okay; it had been okay. She squeezed him one last time before releasing him, and his gaze fell onto Happy who was standing just a few feet behind May's back. He wasn't dressed in a suit anymore and it was still strange for Peter – to see *Happy Hogan* wearing a blue polo shirt and washed-out jeans and God, were those *Nikes* ?

“Hello, Peter,” the older greeted him with a wave and a small smile, that weird kind of grimace that looked like was reserved only for him and Tony. He smiled back at him, warmth spreading across his chest again – because Happy was the closest to Tony Peter had right now. Sure, he could call Pepper and Morgan, and ask them to hang out, and he was certain that they would never decline, but there was something special about seeing Tony's best friend instead of his wife and kid.

He leaned back, away from May's familiar arms and back to the chilly air filling the room. He cast a look at Quentin who was looking right back at him, that quizzical glimpse back in his eyes, shoulders tense, and took a deep breath. Honestly, how bad could Happy be?

Now or never, he thought to himself and opened his mouth to speak, but, well – Happy was faster.

“Seriously, Peter, you have no idea how much I already know about your unexpected guest. There's no need to explain yourself to me.”

And it looked like not only Peter was left agape at his words – the same happened to May who turned on her heel and stared at Happy with a hand on her hip. She didn't look quite angry, no, but she wasn't that content with his opinion either.

“Really, Harold? I thought we talked this through.”

“But what am I supposed to tell him? He’s an adult, darling. He can make his own decisions,” he sighed, not looking away from her even once and Peter kind of felt like he was intruding something. “And let’s not forget he’s Spider-Man. He’s an *Avenger*, darling, if there’s anyone who can handle themselves, it’s him.”

At that, she shook her head vigorously, her back still to the boy. “But, Harold—”

“Darling,” he repeated in that soft, soft tone that sounded dangerously similar to Quentin’s, at times. He stepped forward, reaching to take May’s hands in his own and Peter had to admit – he was impressed with how easy it seemed to be for Happy to calm her down. “I’ve been working with people like him my whole life. They seem reckless and stupid, sometimes, but there’s no one else in the whole world who deserves to be trusted more.

“He’s just like Tony. The same dumb energy and the same accidental decisions. And you can’t do anything about it, darling. Believe me, I’ve tried. But that’s just how they are.”

No matter how peculiar and unnatural that sounded, especially out of Happy’s mouth of all people, it was something that made Peter’s heart clench painfully, his breath wheezing suddenly. Being compared to Tony was almost unbearable – at least now, because before the Blip? When it had been all good? It had made him proud each time someone had commented on their common features, on the traits they had shared. Sometimes it had nearly felt like he could be Tony’s son as well – born and raised, of flesh and blood. He’d always known that letting this hopeless dream to crawl inside his heart had been meant to break him, sooner or later, but he had never found it in himself to care.

It was one of the only good things in his life; one of the few left that he had after Tony.

May bowed her head, shaking it once again and Peter knew, he knew that she was going to argue with Happy, because how could she not? Her opinion on her nephew’s decisions was entirely disparate that the older man’s and Parkers never liked to change their minds; sometimes it felt like it was just out of their reach.

“Okay,” she said instead and a sudden bolt of pain travelled up Peter’s neck as he looked up sharply, locking his eyes with the back of May’s head.

What?

May turned around to face him, a look of defeat on her face, somewhat. Suddenly, she looked so tired, so old that she seemed like a different person and Peter felt guilt creeping up his throat.

“It looks like I have no support in this matter,” she said, her voice a mixture of melancholy and amusement, by some miracle at the same time. Peter’s shoulder hunched, guilt starting to choke him, inch by inch tightening around his throat, but before he could speak, she did. “And it looks like I have to accept that you’re not my little Peter anymore, honey. You’re a man, aren’t you?” She almost whispered and smiled wistfully, reaching up with her hands to cup his face.

Her palms felt so warm, so familiar around his cheeks and he felt an urge to cry. He missed being a little boy who used to trip and fall, scratch his knees on the rocks and run to his Aunt, to let her hug

him. It seemed so distant now and it was distant, a long time ago; a lifetime back.

“I know that you can take care of yourself, honey, I know that. I just– I wasn’t prepared for this. I always thought, I *hoped* you’d always be my boy. A boy I can protect.”

“I know, May,” Peter said, guilt and longing clear in his voice. He nuzzled her palms like a puppy, causing her smile to look a little happier. “But I’m not going anyway. And I’m still your boy.”

She looked slightly startled, and then her expression changed into a relieved one, a smile that seemed more like herself – more content, more cheerful. She sniffed and only now Peter noted her glassy eyes that she had to wipe with the back of her right hand.

“I’ll take you at your word.”

And it seemed... It seemed lighter in the room, airy, and the guilt that had stuck like bump in Peter’s throat now loosening, slowly dropping down to sit at the bottom of his stomach as usual. He straightened his back as May took back her hands, and sent Happy a grateful smile.

He owed him.

The rest of the evening went quite well – good even. May made loads of spaghetti with Happy at her side, both of them bickering over literally anything and ignoring Quentin as best as they could and Peter? Peter was content with it, he was content with the peace that they left them to, with the feeling of *domesticity* that he was slowly getting used to just because he finally could. Just because he finally had someone to share it with.

He tried to forget that this someone was meant to leave his life soon, breaking his heart in that agonizing way that so many people had done before, like that same person had already done once; he tried his best.

Dinner was awkward, to say the least, but at least May was determined to take the role of the host and kept talking and talking and talking throughout the meal, excluding Quentin from her questions and avoiding him with her gaze. The man just sat there with his knee leaning on Peter’s like it was the most ordinary thing in the world and the sheer gesture made warmth blossom in Peter’s chest, even though he still remembered his words from earlier.

They kind of faded in comparison to the soft glances Quentin kept casting his way.

May and Happy left shortly after, with his Aunt’s promise that she would visit him soon – and she pointedly put accent on Peter and Peter alone, pretending that Beck didn’t exist which was, to be honest, a childish move, but who was he to judge? He just nodded with a tight smile and reciprocated her embrace before closing the door and leaning his back on it.

It was *exhausting*, he had to admit, even though he knew that it *was* necessary and well, would happen someday, one way or another. But he wasn’t prepared – he wasn’t prepared for any part of his life at this point and the only thing that he needed, that he desired was a week or so of *peace*.

It was too much to ask for, apparently.

He took a quick shower, trying not to look at himself in the mirror, not wanting to see the thin, *too thin* body that had started to lose its muscles, not wanting to count the ribs that were peeking from under his skin. His pyjamas felt so soft against it as the cotton fabric hugged him and he finally,

finally was able to take a breath that reached the bottom of his lungs.

He almost bumped into Quentin who stood in the middle of his way from the bathroom to May's room, arms crossed and lower lip reddened from biting. Peter came to a halt on time and raised his eyebrows.

"Are you okay?"

The man was quiet for a moment, his intent gaze fixed on Peter, motionless, but when the boy opened his mouth to speak again, he shook his head.

"I was thinking about your nightmares," he admitted and Peter felt a cold, cold shiver run down his spine. The hair on the nape of his neck stood up and Quentin seemed to notice the slight change in his demeanor, because his arms dropped to rest by his sides. "It's nothing, really. I just— I don't want you to have them again. I want you to sleep through the night at ease, and I thought that maybe— It's stupid, I know," he added quickly, all of a sudden looking shy and *insecure*. "I know that you sleep better when there's someone nearby, and I thought... Would you like me to stay with you tonight?"

Okay, that was something that Peter surely hadn't fucking expected.

At the look of sheer surprise on his face – because what else should his face look like, honestly? – Quentin raised his hands defensively, eyes wide. "I'm not talking about cuddling or shit, believe me. I won't touch you. I mean just— I dunno, sleeping together in a bed sounds creepier than I thought it would, sorry."

Peter couldn't do more than stare at him, dumbfounded, and stare and stare and stare. It sounded creepy, of course it did, and something twisted in his chest at that, painfully, bringing a taste of panic onto his tongue for a second or two. Europe came to his mind, and London, and that stupid fucking bridge, and it was so fucked up.

But what did he have to lose? It was this or another night of tears and sweat, and screaming, and burnings in his lungs. It was either this or another painful night in his collection.

"Why not," he replied in the end, plainly, not sure about it at all. Quentin's eyes widened even more and it looked at least slightly ridiculous, making Peter's chest feel a little lighter with amusement.

He could do this, right?

They ended in May's bed, because Peter's one was too narrow for Quentin alone, with the boy on one side and Beck on the other. The sheets they shared warmed up pretty quickly, surprising Peter who melted into the pillows with a sigh when his body stopped feeling so *cold*, laying on his side, face towards the man. The latter chose to rest on his back, both hands on his stomach and sheets barely reaching them while Peter tugged the comforter all the way up to his ears.

"Are you always this cold?" Quentin's whisper cut through the silence like a knife through butter, but Peter found out that his voice didn't disturb their peace at all – on the contrary, its soothing timbre blended with it, forming a soft, soft almost-lullaby.

"Yeah," he whispered in response, opening his eyes a bit to glance at the man who was looking at him in the dark, or at least trying to. "I don't know why it happens. My accelerated metabolism

should make me feel hot, but something must have gone wrong.”

The only reply he got was a quiet hum, yet it felt right, somehow. He let his eyelids fall, knowing well that the man couldn’t even see him clear and there was no point of staying on guard – and besides, he was really, truly tired. Maybe if Quentin’s theory worked, and he had a feeling that it would, he could sleep for a while without a break.

“Peter?”

The boy sighed, trying to make the air sweep against the walls of his lungs. It always felt refreshing, to get some oxygen into his brain as well. “Yeah?”

“Would you kill me there, on that bridge, if you had a chance? If I showed myself to you, unarmed?”

It was difficult to think with this sleepy haze clouding his thoughts. He frowned, adjusting the pillow under his head lazily before settling on it again, and he found that he couldn’t focus, couldn’t focus the way he did while fully conscious – but somehow he knew his answer well.

“I wouldn’t. Probably,” he added after a second of consideration. “I don’t kill people.”

“But I hurt you, didn’t I? I’m not your typical ‘people’.”

“And why should it make me kill you?”

“Because I deserve it.”

Peter blinked his eyes open, looking straight at Quentin. The man was frowning heavily, facing upwards to the ceiling and his eyes closed, and it was clear that something was bugging him, not letting him find his rest. The boy waited a moment or two, taking one breath after another before deciding that it was about time he spoke. He was thinking too hard; he wouldn’t find any other answer anyway.

“No one deserves to be killed. You’re not an exception.”

It might have been just a trick of his drowsy brain, but he could swear that he saw something shiny slide down Quentin’s cheek; the man made no move to wipe the tear though and Peter wasn’t sure if it was even there.

It was silent again, for a long, long time before Beck cleared his throat gently. “I guess it’s about time we go to sleep.”

Peter hummed in agreement and let his eyelids fall again, swimming in the shapeless darkness beneath them that calmed his swirling thoughts, made his breath somewhat easier. “Goodnight, then.”

“Goodnight.”

It felt like he was also getting used to using Quentin’s heartbeat as his personal lullaby, trying to synchronize his own with it, focusing on its steady rhythm. He would’ve lied saying that it didn’t make him feel detached from reality, that it didn’t make him feel *safe*.

He would've lied saying it didn't make him feel like he wasn't alone anymore, after all.

high as the sun

Chapter Notes

This chapter is slightly different from the things that I usually write, but I'm really happy with how it turned out. And I've written it for my girlfriend, because she's my definition of happiness, and it felt nice, being able to finally create something so sweet and warm.

Beware, some realizations on the way ;)

Title from "One Of The Drunks" by Panic! at the Disco.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The night was dark, dark and tranquil, filled with comforting voices instead of images this time, and it passed so quickly and painlessly that when Peter blinked his eyes open in the morning, he felt like a different person.

He wasn't tired. He wasn't sore. There were no streaks of wetness on his face, his pyjamas were dry and he wasn't cold. For the first time in a long, *long* time he could say that he felt *good*.

"Good morning, Sleeping Beauty," a soft voice said somewhere near him and he rolled to rest on his side, facing Quentin who flashed him a gentle smile as soon as their stares locked. His hair was disheveled again, bright eyes only half-opened and the wrinkles around them slightly less visible. It seemed like the both of them had barely moved during the night, their bodies still distant, and Peter smiled at that. Apparently not only he'd had a peaceful sleep.

"Not like you're up long," he replied and snickered when the man closed his eyes, smile broadening.

"The first ten seconds after you wake up and you're already bullying me. I can't believe this."

"It's not my fault you make it so easy."

"Did you just find your brand new hobby?" Beck asked, but there was no malice behind his words, and when his crystal blue eyes found Peter's again, they were warm like the tea he'd made him just a handful of hours ago.

"Time will tell," Peter said and shrugged with a smug grin that faltered a second later.

Time won't tell this time. You don't have more of it with him.

Quentin seemed not to notice, still in his sleepy haze. "Who would've thought that Peter Parker was such a bully? *Respect your elders.*"

Peter huffed with amusement, not exactly eager to shift from the comfortable position, and closed his eyes again. He had a feeling that if he maintained eye contact, Quentin would eventually see all those complicated, stormy emotions behind his dark irises and question him about it. And honestly? It was flattering to know that he cared enough to ask him about stuff, but at the same

time he hated those questions. He hated having to answer straight from his heart, because he couldn't lie. He *didn't want* to lie to him.

He felt the mattress moving and when he blinked his eyes open, Quentin was halfway standing up from the bed. His hoodie – *Peter's hoodie* – was creased all around his chest and sleeves, and he looked so domestic, the hair on the back of his head flattened out a bit from the pillow. Peter furrowed his brows in confusion.

“Where the hell you goin’?”

Quentin straightened his back and turned around, smiling a little at the slurring words. “To make us some breakfast.”

“You? And cooking? I think our stove isn't under warranty anymore.”

“Hey!” Quentin laughed and put his hands on his hips, his posture suddenly looking dangerously similar to May's. Peter snorted openly, turning to rest on his back. “I know how stoves work, I'm not going to set your home on fire.”

The boy gave him an unimpressed look and sat up, letting the sheets roll down his chest, the cold air hitting his bare arms and making him shiver. “I highly doubt that. You look like someone who needs supervising,” he exclaimed, pointing a finger at the smiling man, and slid his legs off the bed.

Quentin pouted theatrically at that. “So my breakfast-in-bed surprise won't work out?”

And well, it didn't only make Peter stumble while untangling his legs from the sheets, no. It also caused his throat to make a sound that resembled a child's yelp, which was more than embarrassing.

He twisted his upper body to glare at the man, pretending not to see his amused grin. “Your *what?*”

“My surprise for the Sleeping Beauty,” Beck replied and stuck his tongue out, and Peter? Peter couldn't believe his own fucking ears – and now his eyes, too – but before his brain could process the whole situation, Quentin was out of the room.

And God, Peter's cheeks felt fucking *hot*.

Bastard.

Having scrambled out of the bed and cooled his face a little by sticking his freezing hands to it, he adjusted the too big T-shirt that kept rolling off his right shoulder and made a beeline to the kitchen. And that's where he found Quentin, as expected, rummaging through the fridge with deep focus on his face, one hand on the fridge door and the other scratching at his chin.

“And what did you come up with, Socrates?” The boy said and to his surprise Beck didn't turn to look at him; he seemed highly entertained, staying in the role of a philosopher as he eyed the fridge contents with squinted eyes.

“I came to a conclusion with two options,” he declared and glanced sideways at Peter to make sure he was listening – he was. “I can offer you delicious scrambled eggs with ham on *butter*, ” he

emphasized the last word and the boy wasn't sure why. Probably some dramatic reason, he decided. "Or, you can be served grilled cheese sandwiches with herbs. The choice is yours."

It was God knows how long since Peter had an opportunity for such simple fun – and he wasn't going to waste it. He wasn't going to waste a day like this, a day where he could feel like himself before the Blip, where he could pretend that there were no nightmares to hunt him on regular basis. And even if it was the only happy day he was going to have for the next few months – he wanted to enjoy it as much as possible.

And so he crossed his arms on his chest and put a precisely measured contemplative look on his face. "The choice is difficult, I must say. What about the sandwiches? Are you gifted enough to prepare them?"

Quentin turned around at that, a pinch of affront hiding in the corners of his lips, but the gleam in his eyes was hard to ignore. Peter knew that he didn't really feel offended.

"And the answer is difficult as well, but I will do my best to gratify your wishes."

"I am already quite gratified with your response, Gordon," he replied and smirked at his own joke, and for a moment Quentin looked like he was about to smack him on the ribs. And God, it truly seemed inevitable, making Peter jump to the side with a laugh lingering on his lips, but then the man stuck his tongue out again and turned back to the fridge.

Did he actually do this the second time in less than five minutes? How old was he, five?

Seeing all the ingredients for breakfast laid out on the counter, Peter felt a strong urge to just *go and make it*, but it was nice, being able to just sit on the kitchen chair in the corner and watch Quentin do it for him. He felt *taken care of*, warmth spreading around his chest like hot water in the shower, contrasting with goose-flesh on his forearms.

"You're shaking," Beck remarked all of a sudden, looking up at Peter from the cutting board. His gaze was attentive, locked firmly with the boy's, and Peter shrugged.

"I told you I'm cold," he murmured and dangled his left leg forward and back, forward and back from the high chair. "It's somewhat worse in the morning."

The man said nothing at that, shifting his attention back to the handful of herbs he'd been cutting and Peter let his stare linger on his side-face. Its lines were smooth, all curved and soft, hiding Quentin's sharp character behind the relaxed outline of his eyebrows and lips that turned slightly upwards at the edges, and suddenly all that Peter wanted was to sketch. Too bad he didn't even draw.

Beck turned abruptly, abandoning his work and striding out of the kitchen without a word. The boy felt anxiety build up in his chest, being left there like a kicked puppy, but before his breath could start to waver, Quentin was back, a thick beige blanket in his hands. Peter glanced at the fabric, already recognizing one of the covers that always laid on the couch, and then up at the man who'd already found himself closer to Peter than the boy was ready for.

"Throw it on," he murmured quietly, not exactly an order. He didn't quite meet Peter's eyes – no, he stepped even closer and draped the blanket over his shoulders, adjusting the material in front of the boy's chest until all at once he just stopped and returned to his herbs.

And Peter sat there like an utter idiot, not comprehending a thing and staring at Quentin's side-face like a fish. He was... stunned, yeah. He could call it being stunned, because hell if he knew what to think right now. What to do.

But he wasn't going to complain. The blanket was heavy and comforting against his spine and arms, warming up quickly, bringing immediate relief to his freezing muscles. God, he felt so warm, *finally*, and Beck must have noticed the way his shoulders relaxed under the weight, because his lips quirked up. Peter cleared his throat, feeling heat creep out onto his cheeks stealthily.

"Quentin?"

The man stopped midway cutting and looked straight at him, at last. "Yeah?"

"Thank you," the boy said, trying to make his voice as gentle and grateful as he felt, and he had a feeling that it worked, if the soft, soft smile on Quentin's face was something to be judged by.

"Anytime."

The sandwiches were more than fine, Peter had to admit. The bread was crispy and the cheese melted, the pinch of herbs thrown making it taste a little more refreshing and less greasy. Everything was *just right* and when Quentin put a mug of Earl Grey beside his plate, Peter was ready to throw his arms around the man's neck.

"God, it's so good," he mumbled with his mouth full, reaching for the mug to feel the warmth of its ceramics. Quentin laughed at that, quietly, as if not wanting to disturb the peace of their morning. His knee was pressed against Peter's as he sat right next to him, the kitchen counter too small to give them more personal space, and their shoulders touched every time Peter danced a little with joy.

"I'm glad to hear you like it."

"*Like it?* You gotta be kidding me. I *love* it," he added and sure he knew that he was exaggerating, but he felt happy, okay? He felt happy and he felt like exaggerating, he felt like laughing and making jokes, and he felt like bringing that small content laugh out of Quentin's chest as well. It made him feel happy.

And maybe he *was* truly happy, just for one day. Just the two of them in Peter's little kitchen, both of them in their pyjamas and mouth full of bread and cheese. And maybe this was Peter's definition of happiness.

He decided that he liked it.

Not so long later Quentin said something about having to check on his bandaging, and Peter didn't really pay attention, busying himself with the remains of his tea. He only nodded in agreement and took to washing the dishes, letting the man disappear in the bathroom without any further explanations. And it was quiet at first, the hum of tap water the only sound in the flat, and after five or so minutes it started to bite at Peter's nerves. As soon as all the dishes were clean, he grabbed the kitchen cloth, carefully wiping his wet hands, and made a beeline to the bathroom.

He wasn't surprised to see Beck sitting on the edge of the bathtub again, cautiously checking if his new bandaging was holding fine, but what in fact *did* surprise him was the pair of scissors laying in the washbasin casually. His brows furrowed at the sight.

"Quentin?" He asked, instantly drawing the man's attention. Beck looked up at him, eyes wide, waiting. Peter sighed, his gaze flickering to the scissors. "And these are for...?"

"Oh," he mumbled in realization, pushing himself up from his spot. "I was thinking, well... Could you cut my hair if I asked?"

Peter's eyebrows shot up to his hairline this time. "You just did."

"Yeah, I did. But you see it, right?" He asked, a slight dose of amusement tinting his voice, and raised a hand to point at his hair, and there was no way that Peter wouldn't have laughed at the sight. "I tried my best a couple of days ago, but... Yeah."

"You did shit, not your best," Peter remarked dryly, but reached for the scissors anyway, ignoring Quentin's wounded look. "Just sit back down and let's get over with this."

And that's how they ended there, Beck sitting in the exact same position as earlier, yet this time with the boy standing between his spread legs. The man had his eyes closed, presumably dreading the cut hair falling down his face, and it made Peter feel at least a little bit less insecure.

Which didn't mean that he felt confident.

He didn't tell Quentin that he'd never cut anyone's hair before – let's be honest, the man didn't need that knowledge, right? Peter was handling it just fine. He could cut some strands here and there, trim this spot and the other, and it would be fine, okay? He was fine.

Well, he was everything *but* fine. His hands were shaking as if he'd just gained Parkinson's Disease, making it hard as hell to aim at the right flock, and the warm breaths that Quentin kept exhaling at his neck weren't helping. He'd tried to move away, an inch or two, just to put some distance between himself and the source of the air, but it had been more challenging to use the scissors properly then. And so he was doomed for having his neck heated and reddening, and it wasn't caused just by the temperature.

Because he had to acknowledge at some point that he *did*, de facto, consider Quentin attractive. He'd have to be a completely oblivious dumbass not to, with the man's lean body and slightly darker complexion that stood out just right against the bright clothes that Peter kept giving him. And it wasn't only his looks – because okay, some of it was, but how could a man overlook those crystal clear eyes and full lips that would curl up in a smile every time he saw Peter? *Impossible*.

And it wasn't only that, Peter decided soon after. Yeah, Beck had been an utter fuck back there in Europe, and it wasn't exactly easy to get used to his newly gained kindness here in Queens as well, but it wasn't that Peter was blind and deaf. He'd seen all those conflicted emotions each time he would push Quentin away, he'd noticed all those soft glances thrown his way each time he would smile at the man, actually smile, face bright and all. He *did* know that something had changed in Beck and the sheer fact made his chest feel lighter, but he had no idea what it was. And this made him wary.

When he finished and stepped back to judge his work, he decided that it wasn't all that bad – for

the first time, at least.

“Do I look presentable?” Beck asked all of a sudden, his voice back to that normal warm and sweet tint, and Peter caught himself staring. He snorted, to try and hide his puzzlement.

“It looks good,” he admitted plainly and made another step back, putting the scissors back in the cabinet.

It looked good, okay? It did, the sides of Beck’s head trimmed shortly and the top left as it had been, and the strands no longer looked askew. His hair was shorter, much shorter now, and it only made him appear younger – less than ten years Peter’s senior, probably. And he looked better this way, another thing that the boy had to acknowledge.

“Good,” Quentin said, tearing Peter’s out of his thoughts. His face was lightened with a smile and God, he looked so young. So *innocent*, even though the usual cheeky gleam was present in his eyes. “Thank you.”

Peter smiled back at that, mostly out of habit, feeling the hotness coming back onto his cheeks. “Anytime.”

And Quentin smiled wider at that, happier, the wrinkles around his eyes crinkling adorably, and Peter couldn’t find it in himself to care that he was grinning like a dumbass himself.

And it felt right, somehow. It felt like falling down the cliff, but knowing that there was an ocean below. And it felt right, because crashing through the surface seemed worth it.

Chapter End Notes

[Here's a moodboard I made some time ago for this fic!](#)

drawn to the flame

Chapter Notes

I didn't plan the most important chapter to be the thirteenth, but hey, it's the coolest thing. Like, really. I love this number.

I don't like what I've written, mainly because it feels rushed? Rough? Idek, but my princess liked it, so I'm posting. I'm weak for her, okay? She's the one responsible for this chapter to see the sunlight (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Also, I reject every canon fact about the Blip and make up my own, because I'm trash
¬_(ツ)_/

The title from "Nocturnal Creatures" by Bastille.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sometimes Peter wished for a life that wasn't his. He wished for normalcy, he wished for certainty and safety, and happiness that would come easy and stay long. Sometimes he wished for a life that was peaceful, and simple, and sometimes he just wished he wasn't Spider-Man.

But he always wished he wasn't himself. He didn't want to be himself.

He didn't want to be a broken boy with memories that didn't quite feel realistic. He didn't want to be a boy without parents, without any other family but his Aunt, he didn't want to be a *burden*. Some nights he would cry over the fact that there was no exit from this life, no available chance for change, and some nights he would just lie on his bed and think. Think of what could have been if he was *normal*, think of what could have been if he didn't bring death.

Think of all the things he could have if he just *wasn't himself*.

But most often the hardest part was to try and smile, even just this slightest bit. There were people who could make him, of course, quite easily – like MJ, like Ned or May, or Happy – and he was grateful, yet there was always something missing. It had been missing since the Blip, really, since this timeless and boundless void that had seemed to have squeezed him into a single atom and spread him all around the universe at the same time. It had been missing since Tony's death, since Ben, and though he knew there was nothing he could do, really, he *wanted* to change it.

But maybe he didn't have to do it himself, he mused with his gaze fixated on Beck's side-face, their knees touching and a plaid blanket shared. They had been watching movies all day, nothing truly productive, sprawled on the couch like a pair of cats, and there was something magical in the domesticity – something so *normal* that made Peter feel as if being himself wasn't so bad, after all. As if there was nothing wrong with being Peter Parker.

And perhaps there was nothing wrong in the end, perhaps he was meant to be the way he was – broken and sad, and so helpless sometimes – and perhaps the only thing he had to do was to *accept*, to let himself *be*. The sheer thought felt so fucking dire, but carrying it had been getting lighter and lighter with each day and even though he didn't want to acknowledge the reason, he already knew.

And looking at Quentin only made him surer.

“You okay there?”

Peter’s gaze snapped up from Quentin’s right cheek, covered with fair stubble, to his eyes – and they were smiling, squinted slightly from amusement, the bright, bright hue of his irises gleaming like a full moon. The usually shallow wrinkles in the corners of his temples, around his eyes, deepened with the grimace and Peter couldn’t even feel bad for staring.

“I’m fine,” he answered and rolled his eyes, subconsciously mirroring Beck’s smile and gaining a weak nudge to his ribs. It seemed like casual touches had started to feel normal between them, and Peter couldn’t complain; he missed it ever since he’d stopped going to school and being able to hold MJ’s hand from time to time.

Maybe he was kind of touch-starved, who knew?

“Looked like you zoned out a bit for a moment,” Quentin half-joked, his gaze attentive on Peter. He seemed to really be like that at times – seemingly fooling around, but somewhere deep down there he cared, and it was the most misleading thing about him, Peter decided. It made him hard to figure out.

He shook his head, shifting his gaze from Beck to the TV, *The Martian* playing on the screen. “Got lost in my thoughts, I guess.”

Quentin nodded and didn’t press, never pressed. Peter liked it in him, liked that he didn’t crowd him out of his own curiosity, liked that he never demanded answers for questions that would hit close to home sometimes. Answers that Peter wasn’t sure he knew himself. He appreciated being left as he was for he was fine this way. Mostly.

Although sometimes Quentin would ask, of course he did – there were so many hidden things about Peter that the boy wasn’t surprised. And somehow explaining didn’t feel all that wrong when it came to the man.

“I’ve been thinking, you know,” the latter started, his hand coming to scratch at his chin in contemplation. “I’ve been thinking about the space lately. Well, not exactly lately, but ever since you’d borrowed me this spacey book to read–”

“It’s not spacey! It’s a very regular, very acknowledged publication about space journeys, and that’s a difference!”

“Like I said, this spacey book,” the man repeated and seemed to relish in the look of absolute indignation on Peter’s face, but he shook his head after a second and regained his serious demeanor. It made Peter wary; the man had been this serious only when it came to not so pleasant topics.

“I’ve been thinking and– You really were there? In the space, I mean. *Aliens* and shit.”

Peter bit his lower lip, straightening a bit. As he’d thought, the topic wasn’t all that nice, even though he loved space, really. The only thing he remembered so clearly from there were the circumstances, and those weren’t the best.

He nodded stiffly. “Yeah, I-I was. It was quite a long time ago, but still.”

“What did it look like?”

At that, Peter looked to the side to lock their eyes. Quentin’s were wide open, curious, and somehow Peter knew that he didn’t have to answer. Nothing would happen, he knew, because the man *wouldn’t press*.

But it wouldn’t hurt to try, right?

He sighed, trying to restore his memories, trying to look past the battle noises and blood, and *dust*. “It was... The sky was darker than here, and the stars were brighter,” he managed to fish out from the corner of his mind, and it was only easier from here, the images coming fast. “There was no wind, I think. And the planet looked like shit, believe me, only orange rocks and dirt, so much fucking dirt. I remember coughing up literal soil.”

Quentin laughed softly at that, and God, Peter truly liked that note. “Sounds like fucking hell. Can’t believe the air was so dense.”

“It wasn’t, that’s the thing, but there was so much soil in the air that you could plant fucking flowers by throwing the seeds over your shoulder.”

It gained him another huff of laughter and his heart did a weird leap at the sound. He smiled, unable to stop himself, and dug deeper in his memory. He didn’t care what he could find there, he decided, as long as it got him this gentle laugh.

“I remember that their main star was a lot bigger than our Sun and God, was it beautiful. It looked slightly darker than ours, somehow, I think that it might’ve been on the stage of Red Dwarf,” he mused and cut himself off, looking down to the floor. “I wonder if it’s still there or if it’s already exploded.”

Silence between them, not uncomfortable, but there was something hideous in it and only after a moment Peter noted that it was his own regret. The feeling of grief probably as well, and he felt his heart dropping.

It always ended like this when he would talk about himself. Always.

“You know what it means for the planets if their star explodes?” He asked quietly, not daring to look up in fear of seeing pity on Quentin’s face. He knew that the man could sense his moods and sometimes it just wasn’t *right* to confirm them.

“They are destroyed, too,” was the quiet, quiet reply and the background noise of *The Martian* blended with the sound of Peter’s heartbeat ringing in his ears. The room abruptly felt cold and the boy tugged the blanket up, trying to drown beneath its fabric.

He took a deep, deep breath. No need to panic.

“I was there with Tony when the Blip happened,” he admitted, seeing surprise on Quentin’s face from the corner of his eyes. Well, logical – it wasn’t a public information. “I was standing there and watching him, you know, when it all started. I– The rest of the people that were there, the Guardians, they vanished quickly. Or rather quickly. But it wasn’t like this for me.”

He felt the couch dip slightly next to him, the other knee pressing firmer against his own, a little reminder that he *wasn’t* alone. He could do this.

“My Healing Factor is a traitorous thing, you know? It saved me from dying way too many times than I can count, it makes me stronger, lets me go on without sleep for long. And I’m really thankful for it. But it only made the Blip worse,” he stopped and took an inhale again, faster, feeling like a drowning man. He pretended not to see the alarm in Quentin’s eyes, their glow tarnishing. “When I started disintegrating, Healing Factor thought that I’m injured and tried to fix me. Rebuild me. Taking the flat feeling of *disappearing* and transforming it into raw *pain* of reassembling the cells of my body. I could feel it trying to reconstruct my liver, Quentin,” he added and turned sharply to the side, shooting the words out of his mouth like a machine gun. The man’s eyes were wide, wide and scared, and shocked, making him look like a wild animal. Peter shook his head.

“I clung to Tony as if he was the only thing keeping me alive. And I cried. I made him sad, Quentin, and I’m so fucking sorry that I made him so sad there,” he finished, his voice almost a whisper, and there were arms around him, strong and steady and holding him in place while he shook, because *God*, he was shaking with such force. He only noticed that he was crying as well when his nose felt stuck and he had to sniff to breathe.

“I made him so sad, Quentin. I gave him trauma. I gave him fucking heartbreak, because I acted like a child. Like a *coward*, ” he muttered into the man’s chest, embarrassment of himself immediately swallowed by *remorse*, by *sorrow*. The arms tightened around him, a gentle palm coming to stroke the back of his head and he reached out to wrap his hands around Quentin’s middle, squeezing like his life depended on it.

“I couldn’t even die like a man, because I was fucking *scared* and he suffered because of me,” he whispered and before he could add anything else, he choked on a sob and coughed up. *How pathetic*.

The hand on his head didn’t stop, only moving to stroke the nape of his neck as well, to rub against his spine with warm pressure. He sniffed once again, trying to clean out his nose to finally *breathe*, because he couldn’t force himself to inhale through his mouth, and it was *painful* and–

“You had every right to feel scared, Peter,” Quentin whispered into his hair, his hot breath heating up the skin on the boy’s forehead. “Everyone else was scared. *I* was scared as well. Because we were dying, Peter, and we didn’t know why,” he said calmly and then pushed the boy away an inch or two, and Peter felt anxiety building up in his chest until his gaze locked with Quentin’s. The man’s eyes were gentle, because of course they were; they always were. His hand, resting on Peter’s side until now, moved to cup his face, holding him gently like a porcelain doll.

“There’s nothing wrong with being scared when you’re dying. And it doesn’t make you a coward or a child, or any less of a man, you know? Tony didn’t suffer because of you, and I think that deep down you know this.”

And Peter wanted to believe him, God, he really did. He *tried*, because he wanted, because he thought that maybe there was more to do apart from accepting himself – maybe there was trying. Maybe there was fighting. And maybe Quentin was there to help him start, to guide him, but if anyone could end this fight, it was Peter himself.

And he had to push himself to do this, because Quentin wouldn’t push him – he *never* did.

“I just want you to be right, you know?” He whispered and leaned his face into the hand cupping it, and he could swear that something on Beck’s face broke, shattered, his brows furrowing and

shoulders slightly slouching.

“I’m sorry for bringing out those memories. I always do it. And I’m sorry. You deserve something better than being constantly reminded.”

Peter shook his head, forcing himself to take a deep, deep breath, feeling the weight of anxiety finally leaving. He closed his eyes and waited a long moment before opening them, before taking a good look at the man in front of him.

Because he knew him – he remembered him from Europe, he remembered him from just a few days ago when he had stated that he’d kill a teenager without hesitation. He remembered his illusions, he remembered his tricks and his gun, and he remembered the sick heat of the man’s blood on his hands when he’d caught his wrist, when he’d stopped that finger from pulling the trigger, he–

He remember the sick heat of his blood on his hands when he’d stitched the man’s wound, he remembered the feeling of fever under his palms when he’d checked the man’s forehead and waited, and waited, and waited, because *he couldn’t let him die*; he remembered the small joy he’d felt when the man had woken up and *lived* and–

He remembered those same arms holding him when he’d come home panicking and then waking up to his worried eyes, he remembered those same hands over his own when the night hadn’t been merciful, and he remembered the sound of his steady heartbeat, and the feeling of *safety*, of *being whole*, of *fitting* somewhere, finally and–

And maybe Quentin was right. Maybe he deserved something better.

He leaned in and pressed their lips together, and it felt right. It felt right somehow, for the first time in a long, long time, and it felt like he was home. Like he was *meant* to be here. He reached his hands blindly to cup the man’s face, to feel the rough stubble under his soft palms, to feel his warm skin and his moving muscles when the man tilted his head for a better angle and *kissed back*.

It didn’t last long, that’s for sure, but Peter was worried that if it did, his heart wouldn’t be able to keep up. He felt it stumbling with each beat, yet he couldn’t care less, he thought when Quentin pulled away and rested his forehead against Peter’s.

It was quiet for a moment, their breaths the only sound in the room and the boy noticed, with a pinch of satisfaction, that not only his own was so rapid.

“You’re unbelievable,” the man whispered, the grin clear in his voice, and Peter smiled like a fool, eyes still closed. He didn’t dare to open them – it seemed like doing so would shatter the magic.

“Is that a compliment?” He asked teasingly, because he wanted to live a little. He wanted to have fun, as long as he could, and with Quentin it just felt right.

It seemed like with Quentin everything felt right, somehow; even being Peter Parker.

“You bet,” Beck muttered and tilted his head back, catching the boy’s lips like a starving man, but still being gentle – never pressing. His moves were so tender when he slid his hands off from Peter’s neck and cheek, and down to rest on his side, pulling him into his lap so that the boy was straddling him.

And Peter was happy to comply, letting himself lose in the sensation of the man's soft, soft lips against his own, moving to the rhythm, feeling the arms wrapping around him once again and bringing that feeling of safety back.

They broke away quite fast again, but it felt more like ending a dance, their motions fluid and matching. Peter reached out with his enhanced hearing, tracking the man's jumping heartbeat and not being able to stop himself, while Quentin guided him to rest against his chest, to hide his face in the folds of his hoodie and smell. His scent was strong, strong and comforting at the same time, and Peter closed his eyes, letting Quentin to cover him with the blanket that had slid off of him.

“What did you do to me, Peter?” He heard the man whisper, his content voice hitting the boy's hair like a wave of hot air while Beck still stroked him, still rubbing those gentle circles on his shoulder blades.

And God, maybe Peter was meant to be like this. Maybe he was meant to be Peter Parker, maybe he was meant to be falling for Quentin Beck, and maybe it was right.

Because it definitely felt like it.

Chapter End Notes

[Here's my second moodboard for this thing and it's softer this time!](#)

[A little reminder that there's a playlist for this fic, and it's being updated as the story develops!](#)

by the wayside

Chapter Notes

So. This chapter is more like a filler for me, a soft thing for you to read and take a break, however I have to say that we have the worst behind us. Those boys deserve happiness and I'm determined to give them just that. And I hope that this chapter isn't as bland for you as it is for me :(

Hey, sending you lots of love for these times! Stay safe, my friends <333

Lovely RavenWolf48 has just made a marvelous fanvid based on this story and you can find it [here](#). Seriously, go watch it, it's beautiful!

Title from "Before you go" by Lewis Capaldi.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There was something special about Quentin's arms, Peter decided. They were warm, of course, just like everyone else's, and they were strong, solid enough to keep Peter in place, stilling him whenever it was needed and gently rocking if the boy required reassurance. They had a few things in common with MJ's arms – with their tender grip and their warmth that would spread all around Peter's upper body, and the delicate smell that was clear enough for the boy's mind to recognize it first off – but something was different; something was special.

Maybe it was the way Quentin would hold him – like he was something precious, something that the man didn't want to lose – or maybe it was the soft, soft hum that would escape Quentin's throat and make its way to Peter's skin with its melodic vibrations, giving the boy a feeling of home, of fitting somewhere in spite of all.

Or maybe it was the small kiss that Quentin would place here and there on Peter's hair, a quick peck that felt like a graze of a feather more than a proper kiss, as if the man couldn't get enough of touching the boy now that he was able to.

And it was even kind of sweet.

"Your hair's really fluffy," Quentin's low murmur rang out in the air above Peter's head, in the spot where the man's nose was pressed into the boy's dark locks. "Fluffier than I thought."

Peter scoffed, flexing his fingers on the man's chest, brushing over the fabric of the hoodie and letting his eyes blink open with no rush. "You were thinking about my hair?"

He more felt than saw Quentin shrug, but his shy laugh told him that the man wasn't so indifferent about it. "Would be hard not to, with it looking so perfect when you wake up."

Peter shook his head slightly and grinned, really grinned, his lips stretching out in a smile that probably made him look like a Cheshire cat. He wanted to retort, think up something equally sharp to say, but found that there was nothing. Nothing he could say and nothing he could shoot back, because Quentin's answer was clearly meant as a compliment and nothing short of, and it caused his insides to do a little swirl.

It felt weird to be complimented and Peter suspected that it wouldn't change any time soon, if at all. It felt weird and out of place, as if the compliments were never meant to be aimed at him, and even if it stung to realize it, it was the truth. May's approval for his person was always a bit unnatural, a bit artificial, yet the reason was presumably their family bond. Because who believes that their family's compliments are honest, right?

But when it came to Quentin, they were all but flattering, making the boy blush and lose his words and God, did it feel nice, even if a little awkward. They made him think like getting used to them wouldn't be so bad and maybe, if the man decided to stay (*God, please, make him stay*), he could try, at least.

But for now it was okay to be a little bashful, he decided.

They hadn't got up from the couch since *The Martian* had ended, letting the TV play whatever it had had in its queue, not paying much attention to it as it had blended into the background. They'd shifted a bit though, Quentin laying on his back now with Peter curled up on his chest, the abandoned blanket thrown to their feet and the boy's face resting somewhere between Beck's neck and his collarbone, and it was warm. It was warm, both in and outside Peter's skin, and he realized that he didn't know how much he'd missed out on this kind of human contact.

Quentin's left hand slid up from the curve of Peter's spine to the space between his shoulder blades, spreading some additional warmth that the boy's cold skin needed. He smiled at the way his muscles relaxed under Beck's palm.

He really could get used to this, if he only wanted.

(*He did.*)

"My brains short circuits when I see you cry."

"What?"

He lifted himself up a bit, enough to look into Quentin's eyes, locking their gazes. The man's stare was slightly dazed, as if he didn't really *see* Peter, and it made the boy's chest clench anxiously.

"I don't know what to do when I see you cry," Quentin added softly, or explained, really. "It's been like that since the very beginning. I never know what to say or do then. Your eyes get all red and your face is wet, and you're trembling, and I— And I know that a huge part of the reasons are my fault."

Peter's frown deepened at that, his elbows coming to rest on Beck's chest and bending to prop him up a little higher. The man's face didn't even flinch at the additional pressure and the boy would've lied saying that it wasn't impressive, but it distracted him enough for Quentin to take a deep, deep breath.

"I know that I'm responsible for your state at least partly, and sometimes I forget, you know? It's easier when you smile and I forget, but then I make you cry and it's all back. And I feel guilty for not remembering, and I feel guilty for hurting you back then in London."

And well, Peter didn't know what to say, because yeah, Quentin *was* responsible for his mental health. A lot. Most of the hideous things in his nightmares were brand new, acquired in Europe and

developing with each day Peter would spend alone in his mind, coming back from school to his empty flat and Tony's framed photographs in his room. And it had been rougher since London than it had been before, and it was slowly killing him, and sometimes he felt as if there was nothing he could truly do to stop this self-destructive cycle that he'd created himself.

But at the same time, it was Quentin who made it all a little bit easier, right? His illusions, his lies – it was getting easier and easier to distinguish these from reality, and it felt as if the man was slowly redeeming himself, slowly *changing* into someone that Peter wanted, truly *wanted* to have in his life, even if just for a week or two.

Maybe, if he was lucky enough, there was more than just two weeks.

"It's killing me, Peter," Quentin's voice cut through the train of his thoughts like a knife through butter, making him blink and focus once again on the face beneath. Quentin's gaze wasn't so absent anymore, having shifted into something closer to guilt and God, was it a look that Peter recognized in the mirror. "I hurt you so bad that you wanted to die. How worse of a person could I have been? It's just–"

"I know, Quentin," he cut him off quickly, sitting back on the man's hips. His hands travelled to rest on Beck's strong abdomen, and he couldn't stop them. Didn't want to. "You hurt me and I'm aware of this. But you know that beating yourself over it won't change it, right? Damage is done and we can't turn back time. We have to fix it, that's all."

His words seemed to have had some effect on the man, judging by the long inhale that he took afterwards. His fists came to dig into his eyes and then they withdrew, Beck lifting himself up to sit as well, his arms staying back to hold his weight.

"You know that I'm sorry?" He asked in this small, tired voice that didn't sound like London's Beck at all, that didn't even sound like his Quentin. There was so much exhaustion in this tone, so much guilt that Peter's throat clenched even tighter, making it impossible to swallow.

"I know," he replied and reached out, only because now he *could*, to put his palm on Quentin's cheek, grazing against the fair stubble and registering the way Beck leaned slightly into the touch as well. "I know. It's okay."

"It's not."

"Apologies accepted, I mean," Peter explained, letting the corner of his mouth turn upward to give the man a sign that he wasn't angry. "You feel bad for what you did and I see it. It doesn't mean that it's going to erase all the harm you're responsible for, not only done to me, but it's a start. It means to me that you're not a bad person, Quentin. Or aren't anymore."

Quentin's eyes cleared out a little at that, the relief in them obvious. His head leaned into Peter's hand firmer, surer, and the boy's lips formed a small, small smile that was a smile nonetheless.

"I hope that one day you'll see yourself like I see you," the man mumbled softly, never breaking eye contact. "You deserve to see yourself like this. You're... You really deserve the world."

And with that, it was the end, the conversation over and the air between them slightly clearer. They didn't stop staring at each other for a minute or so after – just because they could, just because it wasn't so creepy anymore – before Peter's hand slid to rest on the side of Quentin's neck. He relished in the peace that swept over them when he leaned in and placed a soft, soft kiss on the

man's forehead, letting him know that even if the rest of the things weren't okay, at least they were.

They were okay.

The glowing gold of the setting sun was probably Peter's favourite detail perceivable throughout the day, the power of the day and the tranquility of the night gradually blending together and creating sights that would always differ, that were never the same. There were no two identical sunsets and Peter liked the metaphor – because there were no two identical days as well, and sometimes he liked to hope that it meant his days, just like the sunsets, were getting more colorful.

Being Spider-Man had also taught him something else, adding another instinct to his set – the closer to the night, the more alert he felt, his muscles tensing up with each darker and darker shade of the sky. The reason for its development was simple: going out as Spider-Man was always safer in the dark, the black of the night hiding the window he would climb out of, and that was the time he would usually reserve for his patrols; and now, being well-rested for the first time in a long, long time, Peter felt his body readier for any challenge than it had been for weeks now. And his Spider-Man instincts were apparently going ape-shit at that time of the day.

“You sure you're okay?” Quentin asked from his spot on the kitchen counter, his eyes attentive. He was sitting there with his legs dangling an inch or so away from the floor, his hands gripping the wooden edge of the counter and his upper body leaned slightly in the boy's direction. For the last twenty minutes he'd been watching Peter cook – or try to cook, really – their dinner, but with each coming minute the boy's hands had been trembling with more force and God, it was fucking *maddening*.

“I'm fine,” he repeated for what seemed like the hundredth time already, yet he knew that it did nothing to calm the man's nerves. Somehow, it was even more exasperating to know that Quentin, by some miracle, could sense his moods and feelings, and it seemed that his Peter Tingle didn't count this skill as a danger. *Traitor*.

He heard the man sigh heavily. “Peter, I'm not blind. I see that something's going on. Just tell me.”

And acting like the child he was, Peter didn't answer. He really didn't want to be angry at Beck – because Quentin didn't do anything wrong, because he was only worried; because he *cared* – but it was too much. His hormones weren't stable yet and compiled with his raving instincts they made his skin crawl, itch, his mind race with anxiety and it was making him *crazy*.

“Peter, please, just—”

“I need to go out, okay?” He turned around sharply, making the man flinch and lean back subconsciously. He took a breath, a deep, cleansing breath that reached the bottom of his lungs, closed his eyes and slouched slightly. “I'm sorry. I need to go out, because my Spider-Man feels like shit when he stays inside for too long, but I don't *want* to go out. *I* am not ready, even if my body is.”

Silence swept over them like a furious wave once again. Peter didn't dare to open his eyes in fear or seeing something in Quentin's face (fear? pity?), but it turned out that there was no need to fret about the man's feelings as a warm palm landed on his cheek, holding him in place like a precious, precious thing,

"We can go on a walk, if you want," Quentin's deep, low voice resounded in the air in front of the boy and when he let his eyes blink open, he noted the way they were standing so close, but still somewhat away from each other. And it was weird, weird and quizzical, yet a moment later Peter understood that Beck simply didn't want to crowd him.

Bloody gentleman.

"I know that it's not the same as your patrols," the man continued, completely oblivious to the astonishing look Peter must have been casting him, because how the hell was this guy so polite sometimes? "But it's still better than staying inside like in a fucking can. And you can breathe some fresh air, if I can call New York's air fresh."

"It's not that bad," Peter argued and didn't even notice the way his posture relaxed until Quentin grinned like an idiot, his palm, so far resting on the boy's cheek, moving to ruffle his hair.

"I knew that a walk would lighten you up," he said with such confidence that Peter snorted, shaking his head.

"You're fucking awful," he mumbled with a wide smile, turning on his heel and taking to clean up after himself, putting the ingredients away for later and wiping the counter with a wet kitchen cloth. He was very much aware of Quentin's gaze focused on himself this whole time, yet somehow it didn't feel wrong at all – it even felt quite warm.

He knew that the man was watching him with nothing short of curiosity and care, and there was no more Mysterio there that would lurk around to look for his mistakes. There was only *his* Quentin.

It was quite an issue to find the man enough layers to keep him from freezing in the chilly evening air, his jacket too thin to give him enough protection, but eventually Peter managed to fish out more oversized hoodies that fit Beck just fine from the bottom of his wardrobe. He even managed to bribe him into wearing a soft grey hat and to be honest, it was rather easy. All he had to do now was to smile sweetly and it seemed like the man was ready to fulfill his every request.

Cute.

The streets were still crowded from the lively flow of people going all directions, some of them heading to work for their night shift, most of them, the lucky ones, heading home to rest, to see the faces of their loved ones and their pets. There was something magical about being a part of a crowd like that, something that made Peter feel like he fitted, like he was in the right place and in the right time. The feeling of anonymity always felt better than being Peter Parker then.

But now, looking at the Quentin by his side with this small, content smile as they walked through the street aimlessly, he thought that maybe he didn't have to become a complete anonym without a personality to blend in with the crowd.

"Aren't you cold?"

Peter turned his head to the man, glancing at his playful smile and the way the wrinkles around his eyes deepened, again, adding another pinch of charm to his handsome face.

“I am,” he answered and dug his hands deeper into the pockets of his thick jacket, bumping against Quentin’s shoulder. They were walking side to side, close enough for their arms to brush occasionally, and once more time there was so much domesticity in the simplest things that Peter regretted not having it before.

“You should’ve worn something warmer,” Beck retorted, making Peter snort, but before the boy could reply, he continued, “I’m going to make you hot chocolate when we come back. That’s something I *can* do, surprisingly.”

And that successfully shut Peter up, making him look straight ahead in shyness and bury his nose in the high collar of his warmed jacket. He could feel happiness radiating off the man and God, he would’ve lied saying that he didn’t feel at least tiny bit happier right now. He felt comfortable and he felt content, and he felt like all the pieces were falling into their places, like the puzzle was slowly being solved and maybe this process was never a difficult one. All he had to do was to try, right? The rest would always come.

And feeling Quentin’s safe presence just by his side, feeling the bustling energy of Queens and being in the place where he wasn’t standing out so much, he decided that he could do it.

He could wait for the rest to come.

Chapter End Notes

And for the end, I have a question for you guys: would you be interested in a short series of one shots connected with this story? Like, slices of life and such, and I could be taking requests for literally anything in this small universe and you know. It's up to you, my dudes ;) <333

chest-to-chest

Chapter Notes

GUYS, listen, two days ago I finally saw my girl for the first time in two months and I've never felt more alive!

(Also, my Far From Home poster had arrived a couple of days ago, and it's now hanging just above my bed and guess what? Inspiration won't leave me now, not when Jake's looking at me with this judgement in his eyes. I gotta wriiiite.)

Besides, I'm literally drowning in my chemistry homework, still questioning my choices. I swear, the only good thing here is that I share my classes with my girl. I hope that you're all healthy and staying home! *sending y'all a big big hug*

Title from 1-800-273-8255 by Logic ft. Alessia Cara & Khalid.

It soon turned out that yeah, Quentin's poor cooking skills luckily included making hot chocolate and God, was it a good one. Peter hadn't had it since sixth grade or something, with him always forgetting to do it and May probably thinking that he no more liked it, and he only now realized how much he missed it. He missed the sweet, sweet taste that would scratch at his throat, and he honest to God missed the heat that it would spread in his chest and stomach.

"Seems you really like it, huh?" Quentin laughed under his breath, leaning his hips on the kitchen counter, arms crossed and staring at Peter shamelessly. This time it was the boy who was sitting on the wooden counter with his feet rather higher than Quentin's previously, slouching a little to wrap himself around the mug he was holding. He smiled warmly, letting his gaze wander to the man's face.

"You don't even know," he replied and glanced down at the mug, Beck's intense stare suddenly too much. He swayed his legs like a child for ten seconds or so, letting the silence roll around them, before he looked back up. "So you're telling me that the enigmatic and deadly Mysterio was having a cup of hot chocolate in his evenings?"

Quentin huffed at that, trying to look smug, but failing, the shyness coming back onto his features. It was cute, Peter decided, it was cute to see the man so vulnerable and soft, and sometimes the boy would forget that there was a darkness hiding beneath.

A darkness that he hoped the man had left behind.

"I shall agree for the sake of politeness."

"Yeah, you say that," Peter snorted, shaking his head with slight amusement, a smile stretching on his face. "I know better."

"Could you stop exposing me, please? I have a reputation to uphold," the man whispered in an exaggerated whisper, a hand coming to shield his mouth in a dramatic manner. He turned around to clean after himself, but it would be difficult to miss the content grimace that painted his face and honestly, Peter couldn't stop himself from smiling even wider.

It felt good to smile this easy. It felt as if it was all okay, as if his life wasn't such a disaster and he was meant to be happy.

But was he?

The walk hadn't been exactly enough to get rid of all the stiffness and excess energy that his body had decided to manifest, yet it was *something*. It had helped him to calm down a bit, to lower his pulse and stop the trembling, and he guessed that it had to be enough for now. He really didn't feel ready to go out there alone – partly in fear of his memories getting triggered again; partly in fear of seeing the newest Iron Man's graffiti, this time clearer. He didn't feel this reckless yet.

He wanted this *right* feeling to last.

This time he asked Quentin to let him check on his wound himself and received a look that shouted *surprise* and *wonder*, a look that reminded him of a wild animal.

"Sure, why not," he answered and shrugged, but Peter saw the confusion in his eyes.

"I want to make sure that it's healing properly," he explained, feeling somewhat timid all at once, and Quentin's face did a weird thing at that, stretching and pulling to form a grimace that the boy couldn't recognize. "I know how it should look, more or less," he added out of blue, hoping to sound more confident than he felt.

And it worked, apparently. A minute later they ended up in the bathroom, Quentin seated on the edge of the bathtub, his legs open wide and Peter kneeling between them. The man had the hoodie thrown aside to hang from the washing machine and seeing his bare chest was different now, Peter decided. It felt more intimate, more personal, not exactly private enough to make him blush, but it still made his breath hitch in his throat as he pressed his fingers against the naked bullet wound.

"It looks fine, I guess," he mumbled, not daring to look up at the man and tracing his fingertips along the shape of the injury instead. The skin around it felt rough and still warmer than the rest of Quentin's stomach, but not alarmingly hot, remaining a temperature that didn't feel distressing, the wound itself seeming to be healing just fine.

Peter could almost forget how challenging it had been all those days ago to keep the man alive.

"You're really lucky," he added quietly and stilled his hand to rest on Beck's abdomen. The man hummed at the contact.

"I'm lucky that you let me in that day," he murmured from above Peter's head, making the boy finally look up. His eyes were squinted slightly from the small, small smile that graced his lips and Peter was once again reminded how much he loved those wrinkles on the man's temples, the ones that accentuated his age and made him even more attractive.

Loved?

"I know I've said it countless times before, but fuck that. I'll keep saying it. Thank you. For literally saving my life even though I tried to take yours just a few weeks back."

Peter nodded at that, taking a breath and exhaling to clear his mind at least a bit. He'd thought about it as well and he had to admit that it hadn't been the simplest subject.

In the beginning, it had been black and white, right? He had been helping out a guy that had tried to murder him and the only thing he had felt for him was hatred. He had been the good guy here and Quentin was the bad one, and their agreement had been meant to last a week. It had been simple.

Sometimes Peter forgot that life wasn't *this* easy.

It had changed a little, didn't it? The moment he'd realized that this Quentin (*his* Quentin) wasn't the same Quentin from Europe, that he wasn't the plainly bad guy anymore and he was just a person, much alike him – since that very moment it had been hard to decide if Peter's choices were either right or wrong. And the more he thought about it, the less he knew.

Maybe he should stop overthinking and start listening to his instincts. Maybe it had been the right way to live all along, and he had been missing out on it, because his mind had been too dark to let him live sometimes.

He knew that Tony would want him to live. And Peter had a feeling that in the end he would regret it if he didn't try.

The mirror wasn't the most compassionate this evening, Peter realized as he tried to dress up after taking a quick hot shower. The bathroom wasn't all this roomy, leaving only a small piece of the tiled floor available to stand in, and sometimes the boy would forget how shitty the high mirror hanging above the washbasin could make him feel.

The first noticeable thing were his ribs. Their outline was getting more and more visible as the days went by, the lower bones sharper and sharper against the skin of Peter's stomach, threatening to cut it, to peer out from his insides and bleed. He hated how they made him look, how thin and weak, and incapable of fighting he seemed. Good thing was that they weren't really responsible for his strength, which hadn't had changed all that much anyway, nevertheless the sight wasn't pretty.

His hips were another thing though. Pointed and razor-sharp, just like his ribs, they seemed to be getting wider than his disappearing shoulders and the more he stared at their reflection, the bigger his urge to cry was. He was disgusted with himself, with the image projected in the mirror, with the image that was slowly looking less and less like him, and there was an overwhelming feeling of helplessness sitting at the bottom of his chest that he just couldn't shake off.

An oversized crimson red T-shirt was his salvation, masking his haggard silhouette and pouring down his upper body, ending halfway his thighs. It was better this way, hiding in clothes that made him look like a homeless person; it was better to let his figure stay a mystery.

Yet Quentin could really read him like a book, sense whether something was wrong and ask – but never push. Peter was slowly getting used to his concern that was never glaring, no. It was floating in the air between them like a smoke, damp and lukewarm like a fog hovering above a meadow in the morning, bringing a feeling of peace when Peter needed it most.

“What's going on?” The question echoed in the dark, dark room, Beck's voice low and soothing once more, his hand a reassuring pressure on the boy's lower back. They found themselves in May's bed again, Quentin on his back with Peter half draped over him, his right cheek glued to the man's collarbone. It was warmer this way, the boy told himself, and there was nothing wrong with being held simply. Everyone needed physical contact from time to time.

His brain was getting more hostile towards him in the night time, he guessed, poking and rummaging through his memories, pulling at the strings like a madman. A chilling shiver ran down his spine at the reminder of the burning in his nose that wouldn't have loosened until the green, green smoke had vanished.

"C'mon, don't give me your silent treatment," Quentin half-joked with a smile clear in his voice, and Peter snorted at that. He blinked his eyes open, tilting his head slightly to glance up at the man.

"I'm not giving you my silent treatment," he mumbled, his lips stretching in a lazy grimace. "I can start if you keep questioning me about everything."

"Oh, and this sounds like a threat. I don't like it."

"You certainly deserve it, you old man."

At that, Quentin opened his mouth dramatically and shut it, opened and shut again like a dying fish, and Peter couldn't stop himself from snickering. "Hey, a bit of respect won't hurt you, kid."

"You call me kid one more time and I swear."

There was no malice behind his words and he was certain that Quentin knew, judging by the wide grin that painted his face and deepened the wrinkles. Peter felt grateful again for his enhanced sight, gazing at the man's features and knowing damn well that Beck wasn't even aware of his stare due to the darkness of the late night.

Just when Peter was sure the man had passed out, his voice resounded in the slightly chilly air of May's room. "So what's going on? Will you tell me?"

The boy squeezed his lips in a thin line and dropped his gaze to the barely visible checkered pattern on a T-shirt Quentin was wearing. It was actually a piece of clothing he'd been given by May in the first months of high school, if his memory was right, and he'd always hated how small he had looked in it. But somehow it fit the man, stretching around his biceps once more and creating a weird depth to his silhouette.

"Nothing's going on," he lied not that smoothly, but still quite surely. He hoped that the level of confidence in his reply was enough, yet it turned out that it wasn't, apparently. It was hard to trick the other.

"Peter." A sigh followed. "I can tell that something's bugging you. And I'm not asking to anger you or make you sad. I want to *help*."

And maybe this was the worst here, maybe this was reason that sometimes Peter had it difficult to convince himself to start talking. Because all Quentin wanted was to *help*, because he *cared*. And there were times that it made the boy feel like a burden.

Everybody's lives would be so much easier without him.

"I'm losing weight," he confessed, hiding his face in the warm, warm fabric of Quentin's shirt, inhaling deeply to make the man's scent surround him. He awaited any sign of irritation, of exhaustion, because let's be honest – he'd already dropped so many of his issues onto the man that he wouldn't be all that surprised to see him run away some time soon.

But there was no irritation. No anger.

“Is the weight loss a sudden or more of a gradual thing?” Beck asked in a steady whisper, his palm starting to rub on Peter’s lower back, spreading comfort all around it. And it made Peter feel even worse, because the man was so, so sweet and caring, and all he was doing was making him worry even more.

“I dunno,” he mumbled in response, his voice stifled by Quentin’s T-shirt. “I’ve been losing weight since like, the Blip and all. Kinda faster after London. I just– I don’t know how to make myself eat at times.”

Another beat of silence stretched between them, making Peter tense up more and more with each second. He felt like suffocating; he felt like a *failure*. He was scared that Quentin’s voice would sound disappointed – he wasn’t sure if he could take it.

A beat of silence, and then another. The hand on his back didn’t stop though, no. Its pace was lazy and reassuring, and it made the waiting a bit easier.

“Do you feel sick when you eat?” Quentin was back and the tone of his voice hadn’t changed – it was still the same patient and warm timbre, and Peter breathed out in relief.

“It happens, but I mostly just don’t feel hungry. When I’m at school MJ reminds me to eat anything, and when I come home I get texts messages from May telling me that she’d leave me something edible,” he replied quietly, turning his head in the process. He stopped when his nose was just above the man’s chest, allowing him to take a cold breath.

“So they know about it?”

“Yeah, they kind of agreed to look after me. It’s annoying sometimes. Makes me feel like a baby.”

Quentin huffed at that, his chest raising and dropping with a wave of silent laughter. “Maybe you are a baby.”

“Yeah, fuck you too,” Peter murmured with exasperation, although he couldn’t stop his lips from stretching in an amused smile. He could practically sense the man’s smug smirk from above him.

“Okay, so maybe you’re only my baby, not theirs.”

And this was it, Peter thought. This was going to be the cause of his death, his heart stammering in his chest and jumping around like an overexcited puppy. His eyes snapped open in shock, but he swore that he wouldn’t give Quentin another reason to be satisfied with himself. And so he swallowed thickly, trying to gain his composure.

But it was cute nonetheless. Quentin was cute.

“But back to the subject,” the latter rescued him, presumably sensing his abashment and not exactly wanting to embarrass him further, which Peter was really thankful for. “They know and now you’re telling me, which means that... I’m in their agreement? To take care of you, I mean.”

He shrugged, barely stifling a huge yawn that was trying to get to his mouth and part them. “I don’t know how about them, but I thought that you should know. I’ve already told you things that no one knows, so why keep secrets like this.”

Quentin hummed at this, acknowledging Peter's reason, and moved his other hand from under his head to stroke the boy's still slightly damp curls once or twice.

"I appreciate you telling me this. And I'll try to take care of you, as best as I can," he added without hesitation, following his words with a simple peck to the crown of Peter's head, a peck that lingered a bit more than usually and made the boy squeeze his eyelids. His eyes felt watery all of a sudden.

Quentin had been already taking care of him, he wanted to say. He was there for him, since the beginning here in Queens, really, even when they hadn't been on good terms yet. God, he cared for him the most since MJ, probably, and even though they hadn't talked all that much about Peter, the man seemed to know everything about the things that worked for him, that made him calm. It felt as if they'd just clicked as soon as Quentin had dropped his mask that he had kept wearing in Europe.

It felt as if their personalities were corresponding to each other despite being utterly different, and the sheer thought made Peter's heart melt with affection.

A low snoring resounded a few moments later, startling the boy out of his thoughts. Apparently, Quentin had already dozed off, leaving Peter alone to his thoughts, but somehow he didn't feel abandoned now. He didn't feel so at loss anymore and even if falling asleep took him quite longer than a night before, it was okay.

He wasn't alone. It was okay.

just young gods

Chapter Notes

I'm SO sorry for posting so late, but at least the chapter's a little longer? I hope it'll make up for you, guys.

This one's a bit happier, lighter. There's not a lot of Quentin, I warn you, but I think you'll be satisfied with the guys that make appearance here. I had to include them as well - I'm weak for them all, really.

I'm not a native speaker, unfortunately, and I'm really sorry for all the mistakes I make - feel free to point them out in the comments, it's truly helpful!

Title from "Young God" by Halsey.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It wasn't like Peter hadn't had ever found it difficult to get up in the morning, because *hell*, of course he had. It had always been hard after a bad night that would leave him dog-tired and achy, and even harder when he'd finally fallen into a deep sleep just an hour or so earlier, but *God*, he'd never think that it could get so, *so* challenging.

Because he was feeling warm and cozy, with Quentin's right arm wrapped around his middle and the man's strong body pressed against his back, the sheets all tangled between their legs and barely reaching their waists. He could feel Quentin's steady breaths on the nape of his neck, heating it up and ruffling his hair gently, and it was probably the first thing that made him consider ignoring his phone alarm and staying as he was.

The second thing was probably Quentin's arm tightening on the fabric of his T-shirt as soon as he shifted to look at the time. 6:20, told him his phone screen proudly, blinking at him with a brand new notification. He squinted at the device.

"Don't get up," he heard Quentin mumble sleepily into his neck and a fraction of second later the words were followed by Beck's nose nuzzling softly into his neck. Peter let his lips stretch in a grin, his heart making that weird little jump in his chest.

"Lazybones," he said in return, trying and failing to hide the dash of affection that tinted his voice, making it sound more like honey than a scoff. He hoped that Quentin was still dozing off, not able to comprehend a thing, and swiped up to unlock his phone.

you coming to school today? theres gonna be a revision

He squinted even harder, his brows furrowing. Did MJ really use a recap to lure him to school? She never did that, always throwing offers for a quick visit in a coffee shop or something of that kind, unless she didn't know what to say.

It smelled of May a little too much, for his liking.

did you talk with my aunt again?

maybe. you never know

God. He really felt like a baby, being taken care of and watched over, and it upset him. It really upset him, because he was eighteen years old and an *Avenger*, he could take care of himself. It seemed as if he was never going to be an adult, as if he was too weak and dumb to live his own life.

Still the thought made him feel *warmth*. Because despite the things that his mind was telling him, despite the fear of being a burden, there were still people that cared about him. There were people who wanted him to be well, people who were ready to conspire behind his back to make sure he was well. And he would've lied saying that his eyes didn't feel watery every time he dwelled on the subject.

He sighed, letting his eyelids fall and relishing in the strong grip of Quentin's hand on his T-shirt, in the presence of the broad chest moving behind him. Maybe he really should try to compensate both May and MJ for all the stupid things he'd done and the reasons for worry he'd given them.

whats gonna be on the revision?

chemistry

we gonna have a test on friday

Oh, so this is what he was missing out while *chilling* at home with the famous Mysterio.

He definitely *should* go to school today if he wanted to pass this one, even if just for a couple of classes. He'd never had any serious problems with understanding chemistry – he'd never had them with science in general, which wasn't the case when it came to English, unfortunately – but it wasn't a secret that their chemistry teacher had a talent for creating questions that absolutely no one was able to solve on the first try.

To be honest, Peter wasn't complaining – he liked science and working on difficult questions that would make his brain boil, and he also liked passing his classes. There was no way he was *not* going to make an appearance.

The thing was Quentin wasn't probably too keen on letting go of him.

"I really need to get up," Peter whispered sharply, closing his eyes and tracing his fingers up and down, up and down the man's tan forearm, grazing the soft hair there. Beck hummed at the contact, nuzzling Peter's hair once more.

"Why? It's early."

"I need to get ready for classes," he explained and turned around in a swift motion, suddenly face to face with the still waking up man. Quentin didn't look even slightly surprised by the change of their positions, his baby blue eyes locking with Peter's, their pupils soft and irises blown wide.

"And you're leaving me alone?" He asked in that flirtatious tone that wasn't quite working due to his sluggish morning manner of speaking. Peter rolled his eyes with force, feeling his irises go all the way up and down painfully.

"I believe you're mature enough not to set the apartment on fire," he murmured and reached his hand up to brush Quentin's hair away from his forehead. The sheer gesture made his heart jump once again – because he was finally able to, because it just felt *good*. He placed his hand on the

man's chest, the strange, strange pattern of his T-shirt swirling before his eyes, and noted the way Quentin's smile turned softer at the contact.

"Well, I hope you're right, not gonna lie," he joked and snickered quietly when Peter rolled his eyes again, the back of his head stinging with pain. "I'm gonna be sorely bored without you."

Peter pondered on that for a moment before quirking a corner of his lips up. "And I'm gonna get a nice day off from you."

And with that, he slipped out of Quentin's hold, laughing openly at the look of pure offense on the man's face. He noticed the way his fist tightened on the pillow, as if the man was considering sending it through the room in his direction, yet apparently he debated the choice rather quickly.

"You better get ready for your classes 'cause you're gonna be late," he mumbled in response and rolled over onto his stomach, but there was no malice behind his words – and his wide, wide grin was hard to miss. Peter used the opportunity to smile warmly, letting himself stare at the back of the man's head for a little longer than needed.

He hoped that he wasn't giving Quentin heart eyes, because it certainly *felt* like it.

And he wasn't ready.

It turned out that although he sped up the entire process of getting ready to school – which even included ironing his blue plaid shirt that hadn't had seen iron since it had been bought – by the time he finished packing his backpack, he was already late.

Well, shit. A great come-back.

"You're not taking lunch with you?" Quentin asked from where he was leaning against the wall in the corridor, his hair a usual mess, muscular arms crossed on his chest and brows raised. Peter looked up at him, halting halfway tying his black trainers.

"Are you already taking over the role of my nanny?"

Quentin sighed at that, rolling his eyes, yet not moving otherwise. Peter scolded himself in his head and winced, because yeah, he didn't have to be a complete dick when all Quentin did was care for him, but it seemed like he couldn't stop himself.

He truly wouldn't be surprised if it was too much for the man one day.

"At least listen to MJ when she'll remind you to eat, alright?" The question resounded in the air between them and, to Peter's astonishment, it didn't sound neither hostile nor offended – it sounded still caring, *always* caring. He couldn't figure out where the hell Quentin was drawing his patience from.

"I will," he replied (*because what more could he say?*) and forced himself to straighten up, coming face to face with Beck who all but beamed, towering a couple inches over him despite the

thick rubber of Peter's shoes. "I'll be back in the afternoon, probably."

"Probably?" The man teased with a sly smile and Peter wanted *oh* so desperately to roll his eyes, because *God*, this man was impossible.

And he might now know a way to wipe this absurdly handsome look of smugness from his face.

He leaned a little, shifting his weight to stand on his toes and without reaching his hands up connected their lips, pressing slightly to draw this surprised yelp out of Quentin's throat, a yelp that was quickly swallowed by his clumsy mouth. He savoured the burning sensation of the man's stubble scraping against his smooth cheek and smiled into the kiss, because God.

It felt so good to kiss someone he honestly, *truly* wanted to kiss, someone he might be *trusting*, someone who was *respecting* him and *caring*. And it felt right, it felt right with Quentin, because well – because he was *Quentin* and maybe he was *Peter's* Quentin by now, and it felt so much fucking proper to be kissing him right here and now.

He leaned back to his earlier position and felt himself *beaming* like a fool, something that he hadn't had done in weeks.

"Don't panic if I'm late. There might be some things in school that I'll have to clarify if MJ hasn't covered up for me," he explained, although he knew that his friend must have helped him out. She wasn't the type to cause him problems and even if she'd try to do this out of pure spite (let's be honest, she could be a little shit sometimes, and Peter couldn't blame her) Ned and Betty would stop her, of course.

He was so glad he had this weird group of three even weirder people that he could call friends.

"I'll try not to let the fear of being abandoned take over me," Quentin replied and pressed a hand to his chest in a dramatic manner, and Peter almost couldn't tear his eyes off of his slightly reddened lips.

"Drama queen," he murmured and stood on his toes again to plant a quick peck on the man's cheek. He reached down for his backpack, swinging it over his left shoulder before looking back at the man. "Don't overstrain your stomach. Seriously, I don't wanna stitch that wound for the third time."

"Yes, sir."

Peter shook his head at that and turned on his heel, barely looking over his shoulder before striding out of the door. And if he grinned on his way down the many, many stairs, nobody had to know.

It felt... *odd*, to say the least, to be back at school and trying to swim past the huge, huge crowd of other students, even if he had been absent for barely two days. It felt as if everything had changed since then, as if he was a slightly different person and well, he felt kind of *different*.

Maybe it was the fact that for the first time in a year, there was someone waiting for him to come home.

(He tried not to dwell on the subject since it was *fresh*, since he feared that it wasn't a *permanent* change.)

As soon as the crowd cleared out a little and he reached his first destination – his locker with a lock that was hardly even working nowadays – a small cold hand fell on his shoulder, claspings it with enough force to make the boy jump in place. He tried to pretend that his mouth didn't just let out a girly cry, but it was a lost fight against MJ's snort.

"Yeah, nice to see you too, Parker," she snickered from behind him and waited patiently until he turned around. The smile that was lighting up her face made him breathe out in relief right away, the realization that she was clearly *content* to see him slowly making its way into his consciousness.

"You know that I'm hella jumpy," he grumbled, but couldn't stop the wide, wide grin from painting his face, and leaned to catch her in a tight hug, a hug that he didn't even know how much he missed.

"You could use your Peter Tingle, you moron," she replied with a smirk and returned the embrace, clapping him between his shoulder blades. She was towering over him just like Quentin earlier, yet luckily she wasn't *that* tall – just an inch or two taller, but it still made him feel like a preschool in comparison. "It was boring without you here."

"You telling me that Ned and Betty aren't that much fun as me?" He laughed and pulled away, turning back to his locker. It took him barely a second to open it with the code and soon he was flipping through the several textbooks he had hidden there.

"They're no fun to bully. Besides, I think Betty doesn't take me seriously," MJ added after a moment and when he looked over his shoulder, her face was scrunched in a funny looking frown.

"I don't think she takes anyone seriously," he shrugged at that, shutting the locker and propping his backpack on his shoulder. MJ waited patiently until he glanced at her and nodded before starting to walk towards the place of their first class.

It was silent between them for a moment or two, comfortably silent as usual, but when they finally reached their destination, MJ came to a halt in front of the classroom all at once. Her brown stare was hard and attentive, and he felt a shiver run up his arms at the sight.

"Is something wrong?" He asked, meaning to sound confident, but it came more weak than he'd expected, making him wince on instant. MJ's gaze didn't waver.

"This Mysterio guy, did he hurt you since I've seen you?"

The question made Peter's breath catch in his throat, eyes widening. He dropped his hands from the backpack straps to stuff them into the deep pockets of his dark skinny jeans.

He had to tell her eventually that Quentin and he were kind of together, right?

Were they?

"He– He didn't hurt me," he admitted, suddenly more nervous than he remembered he could get. He cleared his throat, trying not to squirm under his friend's harsh gaze.

“Parker. What did he do?”

“He didn’t do anything.”

“Yeah, watch out ‘cause I’m gonna believe you.”

“He didn’t. I’m not lying.”

She shook her head at that, squeezing her mouth into a thin line and turned around on her heel, apparently ready to disappear in the classroom, when he took a deep breath and opened his mouth.

“I kissed him.”

And that *did* stop her dead in tracks eventually, making her turn back to look at him with wide, wide eyes.

“You did what?” She asked in this disbelieving tone that she would often use against him, that was always so successful at making him feel *guilty guilty guilty* all around again. He swallowed, trying his best not to slouch in a defensive manner.

“I kissed him, MJ. I—I really wanted to do this and it’s not something he made me do. It was *my* choice,” he said and found his voice surer now, and louder, and it made him feel a pinch of *pride* deep in his chest. “I know what you’re thinking right now, but you have to trust me. He is *not* as bad as we thought. He’s changed. Or at least I think he’s changed,” he added, because yeah, he hoped that Quentin had changed and all the signs were saying that he *had*, in fact.

And he wanted it to be true so, so *bad*.

MJ shook her head again, fixing him with a somewhat sad look. He wanted to say something, to take that sorry grimace away from her face, but found that he couldn’t. There was nothing to say; nothing to explain. It was *his* life, even if she was only worried for him.

“And what if he hurts you again?” She asked, her voice small, and only now Peter noticed that the crowd around them was slowly getting thinner and thinner with each minute closer to the bell. He tried to smile at her, to cheer her up, and he guessed that it worked, because her eyes softened slightly.

“He won’t,” he said and this time his voice was clear, so confident that he thought Quentin would be proud to hear him now – all secure and sure about his opinion. About his feelings.

“He won’t.”

They didn’t see Ned and Betty until their third period, when they belatedly stumbled upon them in the chemistry classroom, sitting together in the back and whispering something between themselves, and the sight made Peter smile.

He’d missed them.

“Look who honoured us today with his presence,” MJ announced, a corner of her lips tugging upwards in an amused smirk and Peter finally breathed out in relief. Maybe she wasn’t angry at him, after all.

He didn’t have to ponder on this fact, because as soon as he reached the back of the class, his upper body was crushed in a surprisingly strong grip that belonged to none other than Betty. The hug made him cough out with force, but he found out that he didn’t care. He’d missed this kind of hugs.

“Good to see you too, Betty,” he wheezed out and heard MJ snicker from behind him, yet he didn’t mind. It felt *right* to be here with the three of them. And it felt right to make MJ laugh – it wasn’t a frequent thing.

“Bro, you made us worried. How are you?” Betty’s powerful hug was replaced with Ned’s slightly weaker, more gentle one that let Peter take a breath and actually return the gesture, his arms sneaking around Ned’s middle to pull him closer.

“I’m good,” he said into Ned’s shoulder, breathing in the familiar smell of his childhood best friend, breathing in the smell that made him feel *at home* and *safe*, and he really meant it.

He was good.

“Were you sick, Peter? MJ told us you were sick. Are you feeling good for sure?” Betty asked with her voice full of concern, coming to stand behind Ned and stare at Peter with her bright, bright eyes. Her brows were furrowed and her forehead painted with a frown, but she didn’t seem to be suspecting anything. She was just *worried*.

Because she *cared*. And he couldn’t find it in himself to lie to the people that cared about him.

And so he didn’t.

It turned out that they took the news better than MJ – and it made him feel so much *lighter*, so much *happier*. They didn’t exactly care for the fact that his Quentin was Mysterio and it was what made him surprised the most, because he’d expected another fight? Another argument with someone he loved and the sheer thought made him *sick*.

But no, they mostly cared for the fact that Quentin was thirty three which made him fifteen years older than Peter. And it was apparently *unacceptable*.

(Well, Betty thought that it was *cute* that someone older was interested in *their* Peter and Ned seemed to be taking her side. MJ quickly silenced them with her death stare.)

So the official version was that it was unacceptable.

The revision that was his main reason for coming to school – well, it wasn’t his main reason, but nobody had to know that he’d simply missed his friends – turned out to be so difficult that Peter felt grateful for attending. He had a feeling that he could get a lower grade than normally, and that just sounded absurd.

Tony would be so fucking disappointed.

He even offered to take MJ to their favourite coffee shop in Queens after classes, a coffee shop that wasn't Starbucks for once, but it turned out that she already had plans.

"I'm actually meeting with Maggie there in twenty," she explained and he knew that she tried her best to hide the blush that was making its way onto her darker cheeks. And he found it cute to see her so flustered.

"Can I at least walk you there?" He asked with a smile, barely stopping himself from smirking, because huh, who would've thought that MJ was the type to go on a date to a coffee shop? Certainly not him.

It was his third time seeing Maggie, he recalled, beside that one time when MJ had introduced them to each other between classes and that time when the girl bumped upon them during the lunch break, only to steal his friend away to play truant. And even though he could barely see her through the thick glass of the window, her wavy shoulder-length red hair was hard to miss among the gray furnishings of the coffee shop.

It was when he'd noticed the girl that he said his goodbye to MJ, hugging her tightly and smiling a happy smile to let her know that everything was alright.

He was alright as well. And for the first time in a long, long time, he found himself content to be leaving school, after all. He found himself happy.

Because there was someone waiting for him to come home.

Chapter End Notes

[A reminder that there's a Spotify playlist for this story!](#)

I'm having a hard time staying motivated enough to write these few weeks, and all the kudos and comments really help me, guys. Thank you for them! :D <333

hit the highway

Chapter Notes

I am SO sorry, guys, for going away for so long. There's a lot of stuff going on right now - my driving exam, my CAE exam and the end of the year - but I managed to scribble something down for you. Couldn't leave you waiting longer.

This one's specifically for my girlfriend AND my brand new mama - meet her on Tumblr [here](#)! Seriously, those two are responsible for me writing 'cause even when I have writer block, they're here. Thank you both! <3333333

Beware, there's some soft Quentin here. I saw my princess for the first time in months yesterday and I had to make this chapter pure fluff. I hope y'all healthy, guys! It's so good to come back to you!

Title from "8TEEN" by Khalid.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The thing was, Peter had never had anyone to come home to.

Of course, there had been Aunt May when he'd been younger – just a kid, barely tall enough to be considered a middle schooler by strangers, a kid that had been still bright and happy. She'd always wait for him to come home, wait with dinner and with her loving embrace, and all her attention that he'd been given – and it had been good. Really good, actually; the last time he'd been truly happy, not Spider-Man yet.

But that had been a long, long time ago – in another lifetime.

His life had been quite black and white since then, painted in grayscale. He'd been coming home to their empty apartment, quiet and dark and cold, and he'd been alone like a pebble thrown into the lake. Sometimes he'd get a voice message from May or even a call, but that was it – otherwise, his afternoons had been spent in solitude. MJ and Ned had been the only ones that had tried to bring him some fun, to try and revive their old Peter for a moment, at least.

They had never truly stopped, but he knew that they had been starting to draw near the edge, to get exhausted. He wasn't the most fun person, after all.

But the thing was, as well, that now his flat wasn't so empty anymore – and it wasn't quiet.

When he stepped inside, closing the front door behind himself gently and blocking the lock back, leaving his shoes against the wall in the corridor, he almost didn't recognize the atmosphere that was filling his apartment. The air was warm, but not hot, heated just enough that he didn't shiver after taking off his jacket, and there was a muffled sound of the TV echoing from the living room, some kind of a music channel on and playing. It made his chest clench, but not painfully, clench in a way that made his heart get stuck in his throat. It was *domestic* once again, and it was everything that he wanted.

Yet in the middle of it all, he decided that the soft humming coming from the kitchen was his favourite.

He tiptoed in the said direction, hoping that Quentin hadn't heard him coming and he was right – the man was standing with his back turned to him, focused on something that stood on the stove and swaying his hips a little. The low humming was more audible now, clearly produced by the latter, and a moment or two of standing on the doorstep later Peter could finally recognize the melody.

“Didn’t peg you for a Lady Gaga fan,” he teased and grinned when the humming stopped all of a sudden, replaced by a surprised yelp. Quentin turned around to look at him and Peter’s gaze slipped down for a second to look at the hoodie he was wearing – a black Star Wars one with the red symbol of Alliance Starbird. A hoodie that Peter definitely hadn’t had given him himself.

“Well, I couldn’t have expected you to know of my brilliant music taste that many can only dream of,” was the playful response and Peter couldn’t do much except rolling his eyes.

This man was ridiculous.

And he was Peter’s, wasn’t he?

“Thought that you were going to be later,” Quentin added and turned around fully on his heel, leaning over the counter to hide whatever was going behind him on the stove. His hair looked kind of styled, in the end, and they seemed to shine as if the man had used a conditioner earlier – and did they even have these?

“I planned to grab a coffee with MJ, but she had a date,” Peter replied, brushing off the rather strange thought about a conditioner and approaching Quentin. He dropped his backpack on the high kitchen chair on his way, freeing his arms so they could wrap around Quentin’s neck when he belatedly came to a halt in front of him. “I’ll try some other time. Maybe tomorrow.”

“You’re going to school tomorrow again?” The man asked and placed his hands on the boy’s hips, tilting his head like a curious puppy. Peter let his lips stretch in a soft smile, a smile that was returned by Quentin as soon as he saw it.

“Was thinking about it. I really need to attend some classes, you know. And I have that damn test on Friday, so my chemistry is practically obligatory.”

“I’m sure you could prepare on your own. You’re a smart kid,” Quentin said with that damn, *damn* smirk again and Peter could barely fight off the blush that threatened to adorn his cheeks.

He shook his head, swaying slightly to the side to peer behind the man. “You seem to think that you can flirt your way everywhere, don’t you?”

“It’s quite successful though.”

“You’re awful,” Peter mumbled under his breath and leaned out as far as he could, finally being able to peer into the pot that stood on the stove. “Is this soup?”

Quentin looked down at that, suddenly bashful, and reached his hand up to scratch at the nape of his neck. He looked adorable, Peter had to admit, but right now he was too confused (and too pleasantly surprised) to focus on that.

“It’s meant to be soup,” the man agreed, looking everywhere but at Peter. “I don’t even know if I

did everything right, but it's edible, at least."

And *God*, Peter's chest felt so warm all of a sudden that it was straight up *embarrassing*. It was just soup. Simple fucking chicken soup, apparently.

But it still managed to make him smile like a madman.

"So. Are you going to make me a bowl or should I do it myself?" He teased and almost burst out laughing at Quentin's scared face. The man scrambled out of his grip as fast as he could, turning around and making him a bowl with the speed of Sonic – and Peter would've lied saying that he didn't feel flattered a bit by that.

He was being treated like a fucking prince. What his life had come to be in those past few days?

A minute or so later he was sitting in the other free kitchen chair, a hot bowl of soup standing in front of him on the kitchen counter and Quentin awaiting impatiently with his arms around Peter's middle. The man's chest felt warm against the boy's back, a comforting solid pressure that Peter used as a support and leaned back, earning a low content purr.

"I thought you said that you didn't know how to cook," he said quietly, not wanting to disturb the calm atmosphere between them and reaching for his spoon. The man hummed in agreement, his chin vibrating in the spot where it was placed on the top of Peter's head.

"I don't know how to cook. This one kind of soup is the only thing that I *think* I can do."

"Who taught you?"

A beat of silence, as usual when a question was being thrown by one of them. It wasn't anything bad and it wasn't anything good as well, just a reaction they both applied when asked, but it still made Peter's lungs clench in anxiety.

"My mom. She used to make me chicken soup every time I was feeling down. Somehow it always made my day," Quentin said in the end, in that quiet, quiet tone of voice that sounded just a little bit too close to sad for Peter's liking. The beat of silence that followed wasn't long. "It's stupid, but I miss it."

Peter frowned at that, yet kept his voice soft. "There's nothing wrong with missing something. Or someone. We all do that all the time."

"Yeah, yeah, I know," the man whispered, his arms tightening around Peter's middle and the boy was slightly worried that Quentin was too close to crying. "But it's been a long time. And I'm an adult now, you know?"

Okay, maybe he was worried *a lot*.

"And what does it matter that you're an adult? It's not like you stop missing people once you turn eighteen, or thirty, or whatever. Listen, from what I know May's like fifty and she still misses my Uncle. And I still miss him, even though I'm eighteen and it's been *years*," he added, swallowing the bump stuck in his throat before moving his free hand to place it on Beck's forearm. "You're allowed to miss someone who's been gone for most of your life, Quentin. Especially if it's your parent."

Silence, pregnant one this time. Quentin didn't seem to want to continue the subject and even though Peter wanted to ask, to trudge and press for answers, he didn't. Quentin had never done that and he wasn't going to, either.

So he simply reached for the bowl and tried his first spoon, forgetting to blow at it and instantly regretting it, because it was *hot* like the depths of Hell and it burned his tongue, but God, was it worth it. The soup was really good, to be honest, slightly oversalted and lacking greens, but he was the one to blame for the latter – they didn't have a lot of those in their kitchen, really.

But overall? It was probably the best dinner he could come home to.

"I'm not surprised it made your day," he mumbled before reaching for another spoon. "Your mom knew what she was doing."

"You like it?" Came the question, hesitant and quiet one, making Peter's heart break at the edges. He squeezed Quentin's forearm, aiming for a comforting grip.

"It's good," he answered equally low, but trying to make his voice sound gentle. He felt Quentin shuffling behind him and soon he was sitting in another chair, observing the boy with his attentive gaze.

"Good to hear it. I wanted to throw in some more herbs, but couldn't find any. And it would be even better with a carrot," the man added, his crystal blue eyes shining slightly and his face slowly relaxing. Peter sent him an easy smile, hoping to help him with it.

"Did your mom put anything else in it as well?" He asked softly, because he knew that it felt nice. It always felt nice to be asked happy things about people that you missed. It felt nice to be reminded that those simple things existed.

"She'd always put parsley in 'cause she loved it, but to be honest? I hated when she did that," Quentin admitted, huffing a quiet laugh at the thought. "She liked bay leaf though. And I recall it being quite nice."

Peter nodded in musing, turning his attention to the bowl, because really, he couldn't let it cool down. It was too good for that.

"I guess we need to go shopping, huh?" He offered with a big, big smile, somewhat missing the solid presence of the man against his back. "I want to try that soup with all those things you wanna put in it."

Quentin laughed at that, all loud and happy, finally letting his lips stretch wide enough to show his white teeth. "You're serious now?"

"Of course I am!" Peter confirmed, glancing at the man and locking his eyes with Quentin's warm, warm baby blue ones. "Don't you wanna be my housewife?"

"You're unbelievable," the man shook his head, chest trembling with his laughing, but at the sheer look of insult on Peter's face he put his hands up in surrender. "Yes, I wanna be your housewife. At least I can be useful, right?"

"Damn right," Peter nodded with enthusiasm and smiled like a fool again, coming back to the soup with the feeling of Quentin's eyes stuck on his silhouette once more, but he didn't care.

It felt good to be watched with such warmth.

Well, maybe Peter truly didn't like cold. It was biting, it would send shivers down his spine with each blow of the wind and cause goosebumps to form on his arms, making the hair there stand up like a hedgehog's quills. He almost always felt like a popsicle, frozen and stiff, and the only difference was that he could walk.

A walking popsicle, then.

"You seriously need to start layering up your clothes," Quentin noted and slowed down slightly, shifting his entire attention to the boy. His perfect hair was hidden under a deep blue beanie that made his eyes stand out, hands buried in the pockets of his old coat and heavy boots hitting the pavement with a dull sound. "Spider-Man can't catch a cold."

"Spider-Man can do whatever he wants, he's an Avenger," Peter retorted and thrust his hands deeper into the pockets of his coat, knowing all too well that he was acting like a child. He couldn't help it, okay? He was still a child, at least mentally.

And it looked like Quentin was already getting used to his childish reactions, because he only laughed openly and bumped into his shoulder with his own. "Sure he can. And his boyfriend will make him some soup when he catches a cold."

That almost made Peter trip and fall down like a clown, with his face pressed flat against the freezing concrete pavement, and the only thing that saved him was his Peter Tingle that helped to straighten his legs.

His *boyfriend*? Is this what Quentin was now? Is this what he was comfortable calling himself not even three weeks after that one time when they had tried to kill each other? Is this what Quentin decided that he truly, honestly wanted to be? A boyfriend of a mentally ill teenage boy?

And was he Quentin's boyfriend now?

"Well, sure thing," he managed to spit out, trying and failing to hide the deep, deep blush that started to spill on his cheeks and nose. It probably looked like a light frost bite; no need to worry.

Right?

The store that he and May would shop at all the time was not even five minutes away from their building, owned by an elderly couple with a random young cashier hired since the last summer. The store itself was small and cramped with the aisles, but something about it made it different than all the Walmarts and other chain stores in the area – maybe it was the fact that it had this domestic atmosphere you could feel since the moment you stepped inside. Or maybe it was the fact that not a lot of people were used to shopping here, making the place kind of a local secret that wasn't all that available for the tourists.

"Hey, they even have powder candies here!"

And yes, maybe it was the fact that they had powder candies. And Peter had been in love with these since he was five.

It was a pain in the ass to tear Quentin away from the sweets section though – because sure, they could buy a whole lot of powder candies and gummy bears and lollipops (and Peter wasn't the one to argue with this desire), but the longer they stood there, the more things seemed to catch Quentin's attention and they really needed to buy something that could actually be eaten for dinner sometimes.

"But we can eat jelly beans for dinner if we try enough."

"You're the one that complained about not having enough herbs in the kitchen. Stop bullshitting me about jelly beans now."

"I'm not bullshitting you."

"I'm not talking to you until you start thinking again."

"You're no fun," was the response and honestly? Peter felt like an older father that had brought his kid for shopping, immediately regretting the thing now. Luckily, Quentin wasn't the one to start an argument about jelly beans, having instead put them away and making a beeline to the greens section. He stood there like a preschooler, arms crossed and all, until Peter followed him and gave him a quick peck that felt like a graze of a feather on the cheek. He couldn't ignore the cashier's happy smile when he pulled away from the man.

"I'm guessing you don't want parsley?" He dared to joke, glancing at Quentin's face that was starting to stretch in a grin, even though the man was apparently fighting the grimace back with all he had.

Cute.

"No, I don't want parsley," he replied in a low voice, bending to grab himself a paper bag. "But I do want a kiss when we come back."

Peter's neck almost snapped when he turned around with force, suddenly, to look at the man. Quentin was crouching now, gaze focused on the rows of vegetables laying in front of him, but the boy could see his smirk as clear as the day. "And why is that?"

"Let's consider it a compensation for you bullying me," Quentin replied and reached out for the corner filled with onions. "Who knows, maybe I'll develop a trauma because of you."

"A trauma? You're ridiculous, you know?" Peter snorted, unable to stop the wide, wide smile from stretching his entire face. When he looked back from the onions to Quentin, he saw those wrinkles in the corners of his eye once more that made his heart skip a beat at the simple charm.

He was charming. God, he really was.

"Don't make fun of me. I'm reminding you that I can easily poison your soup tomorrow."

"And *that's* a *threat*!"

"Those are consequences, my dear. Threats can only begin to make an appearance."

He *was* ridiculous.

But Peter wouldn't have him any other way.

Chapter End Notes

Again, thank you for sticking with the story! We still got a few things to live through together!

The playlist for this story just got updated - added a few new songs, hope you'll like it!

behind the sun

Chapter Notes

Alright. I'm alive, I'm here and I'm still working on this piece while trying to push through my writer's block! I hope I'll manage to write some more for you guys soon, although I still have to prepare myself for my driving exams and I've just fallen back into The Walking Dead hole and I can't stop reading and watching, but I missed y'all so much. You can't imagine <3

This one's dedicated not only for my girl, as always, but for my greatest online friend as well - kingclown3000 on tumblr. She's been my anchor for so long already, always been there for me whenever I feel bad for not posting. She's a literal angel and I could never describe how much she helps me with this fic. All the love <3333

Title from "Love Is Mystical" by Cold War Kids.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ever since he had been a child, Peter had always looked up to superheroes, whether the made up characters that had only lived on paper, or eventually the real ones that nobody had ever believed would exist. Growing up, he had been lucky enough to see the rise of most of them – the sudden appearance of a female assassin named Black Widow, the unexpected return of Captain America, and at last, the birth of Iron Man that had been later revealed to be none other than Tony Stark.

And Peter had been there all the time, following the development of events, worshipping every new hero that would appear – and God, were there many of them. He knew he belonged to the first generation raised on superheroes, the first generation raised on the awareness of dangers hiding in the furthest corners of the galaxy – the Bold generation that wasn't paralyzed by the fear of all the new threats that the space posed because they were used to seeing them since they had remembered.

Maybe that was the reason why Spider-Man was considered to be the most heroic superhero known to humanity – to be *bold*, just like his generation. His precise age wasn't a knowledge available for the public, although people just *knew* that he was young. His build, his voice, the way he behaved was screaming *I'm young* and maybe it was why they loved him the most.

Because despite the fact that he was there to protect *them*, they wanted to protect him as well. Because he was younger, because he was still vulnerable on the inside – because he still had a lot of things to live and they feared that he wouldn't be able to.

It wasn't exactly a secret, Peter mused. Twitter, Instagram and all the other social media were constantly screaming with posts about him, about *Spider-Man*, screaming about every single time that he was seen somewhere. Apparently, they didn't care that it was all available for Spider-Man to see, which was actually a good thing, calming Peter's anxiety whenever he felt insecure.

Sometimes he wished he could get a simple hug from the people behind those posts – *him*, not Spider-Man. Because it wasn't Spider-Man who needed them.

It was Peter Parker.

Belatedly checking his news feed turned out to be a good decision – it was literally *swamped* with articles asking about their Queens' superhero, reciting the places where he should've been when he was needed, linking Facebook and Instagram posts with newest additions to his hashtag. It was a heartwarming thing, he realized, but the angry tone of some of the pieces wasn't the most kind thing he'd seen.

"I need to suit up," he breathed out heavily, sitting on the kitchen counter with his legs dangling in the air and scrolling through Twitter mindlessly. At the sound of his voice Quentin stopped halfway taking out the groceries and turned on his heel to face him.

"Suit up? You mean jumping around the city in your stupid spandex swimsuit?" He murmured with a grin stretching his skin in a way that deepened his wrinkles. His hand traveled from the carton of milk to his right hip, making Peter snort somewhat weakly at the sight.

"Can't believe you call *my* suit stupid when you're the one that was once wearing a plastic chest plate like a fucking Roman toy figurine," he mumbled in response and let a smile creep on his face. It was clearly a grimace too dull for Quentin's liking because as soon as he saw it, the man dropped his hand from his hip, a frown painting his forehead.

"What's wrong?" He asked, voice small, the question too quiet to sound angry and too loud to seem unsure. Peter dropped his head at that, anxiously opening and closing a random BuzzFeed article.

"I just– I wanna go out, I do," he replied in a tone that was equally low as the man's. "I miss doing something useful. A-and I know that people'll be happy to see me 'cause they seem to be going crazy," he waved his phone to accentuate his words, "but I'm just. I don't even know. I'm scared."

"What are you scared of?" Quentin asked softly, patiently, approaching him slowly as if Peter was a wild animal. He didn't touch him, no – he didn't push. He just stood in front of him, their bodies separated by a nonexistent barrier and the man's eyes fixated on him, but not judging, never judging.

Peter sighed.

"I'm scared they'll be angry at me anyway. I-I took the last couple of days 'off', and I– That's the longest they haven't seen me, you know?" He explained and looked up, locking his gaze with Quentin's, letting his eyes say what his voice couldn't. "I'm scared they'll think that I don't care about them."

"Bullshit," the man mumbled as soon as Peter cut himself off. The boy stared at him, wide-eyed and dumbstruck, making Quentin sigh and wipe his face with his hand. "Okay, wrong word. I meant– They won't think you don't care about them, Peter. You literally went to space because you wanted to protect them. I assure you that it's *more* than enough to make them understand how much you *care*."

"And you're human, just like them. You're not Hulk or Thanos, or whatever the hell there is. They *know* that. And if they care about you, which I think they do, in fact, they want you to rest, too. You can't go jumping around the city and rescuing them like damsels in distress if you're tired."

"Hey!" Peter hissed and frowned, but the amused look on Quentin's face didn't let him be really annoyed. "They're not *damsels in distress*."

“They are and you’re just too dense to come to this conclusion yourself.”

Peter huffed at that, trying *really* hard to look offended. Quentin laughed at his crossed arms and childish frown, his laugh so warm and smooth that Peter’s chest squeezed painfully.

“I love it when you do that face,” the man admitted, his head tilting to the side like a curious puppy, and Peter could only shake his head at him. It didn’t help him that his legs were dangling from the counter, which he had forgotten about and which certainly didn’t make him seem more like an adult.

“You’re a terrible superhero material, has anyone told you that?” He asked with a raised eyebrow; Quentin made that *how could you* face that Peter suspected was his special one, lifting a hand to press down on his chest.

Drama queen.

Before the man could open his mouth and start bickering – as he always did, because yeah, he was a *serious* grown ass man – he rolled his eyes the hardest he could, reaching out to pull Quentin closer by the collar of his hoodie. And maybe the man was strong enough to resist, to pull back against the sheer force of Peter’s arms, but he didn’t, giving in under the boy’s muscles like a piece of butter.

Their lips collided a little too hard for Peter’s liking, yet he couldn’t complain with how warm and soft Quentin’s mouth was, and how his presence made him feel a tad bit steadier. The man’s stubble scratched the boy’s cheeks, burning in a just right way, his hands sneaking up to hold on to Peter’s waist.

“Are you doing it because you like it or just to shut me up?” He heard the man whisper against his lips before a hot tongue swiped across them, and he let himself smile a little wider at the flirtatious tone.

“Why would I have to choose?” He mumbled in response and pressed harder, earning a surprised yelp from Quentin before pulling back. Beck’s cheeks were slightly reddened, not enough to call it a proper blush but still, his lips stretched in this Cheshire cat smile that Peter was starting to like a bit too much.

“You little–”

Quentin cut himself off with a loud burst of laughter and even though Peter just *felt* what he was going to do – or his Peter Tingle did, at least – he let it happen carelessly, deep down there knowing that the man wasn’t going to hurt him.

When had he started to be so sure?

Quentin dived forward with his arms, sneaking them once again around the boy’s waist and catching him, lifting with so much strength that Peter couldn’t *not* feel at least slightly impressed. His legs wrapped themselves around Quentin’s hips instinctively, hands coming to hold on to the back of his neck, the man’s laughing growing quieter and gentler with each second.

“You’re really light, you know that? As if you barely weighed anything at all,” the man noted and his attentive gaze almost made Peter *squirm*. He straightened his back slightly in Beck’s grip,

trying to look more confident than he felt.

“I weigh enough,” he muttered back, keeping the eye contact even though it was *difficult*, it was *challenging*. Quentin seemed to always knew that something was off and sometimes Peter just didn’t *feel* like explaining.

He really didn’t want to talk about this right now – he didn’t want to ruin the day.

“I’m fine,” he said, gentler this time, letting his fingers curl around the short hair on the back of Quentin’s head. The man pressed into his palms subconsciously, apparently not even registering the action, and sighed.

“Okay,” he replied, sounding a little too suspicious, but it was alright. It was fine. Peter knew that the man wasn’t going to believe him – hell, he wasn’t sure if he believed himself, too.

“We can talk about it some time later, if you want,” he suggested timidly. Looking down at the man’s chest, he heard the other sigh again, but it wasn’t so exhausted as before.

“I’d like that, darling.”

And it was alright. It was fine. Quentin was aware of the issues that Peter had been hiding, he knew that some of them were buried deeper than just the fear of getting other people killed. Peter was *sure* that he wasn’t going to judge him.

Or was he?

Peter’s patrol – no, *Spider-Man’s* patrol – was going rather good that day, in contrast to that not exactly luckiest one. The moment he had shot his first web and swung across the first street, a couple of snapshots had rung in the air below him and he knew that soon the entire world would know that he was back. A terrifying thought, really, terrifying that it felt as if his steps were followed by every living being on the planet, but comforting as well. He promised himself not to check the news feed again that day, just in case someone decided to throw some shit his way, and instead rely on MJ and Ned to analyze the articles by themselves.

He didn’t need another breakdown, at least not yet. He liked the feeling of being in control of his life.

He broadened his usual route by swinging past his friends’ buildings and even though he didn’t stop to peer in their rooms – oh, come *on*, a little bit of goddamn *privacy* – it still made him feel better. He couldn’t even describe how easier his life had become the second he had once realized that all of his loved ones now knew about his superhero status.

(Calling it a *secret life* or whatever terms the newspaper used was kinda awkward.)

It felt good not to hide anything anymore – his friendships finally felt true, felt clear and lacking lies that would make his stomach twist. Yeah, yet there was Becky, still not having a clue why Peter would come to school so tired sometimes and why the bruises PE classes put on his body would fade away so soon. She wasn’t ignorant, no – she cared about him and he *felt* it. He felt how

warm her hugs were, he heard the worry in her constant questions.

But she trusted him so much that she had never once questioned his hideous answers. He tried not to think how bad of a friend it made him.

It was getting dark when he finally landed in May's room, exhaustion wearing down on his muscles and joints, making his eyelids droop every few seconds. His Spider-Man suit was starting to squeeze his thighs uncomfortably, causing his steps to be a little uneven, and the second he grabbed his mask and pulled it off his head his lungs felt *free* for the first time in hours.

He knew that those *side effects* weren't exactly caused by the suit itself; it was made to be even *too* comfortable. The reason why he was feeling so drained and achy was that he was just *tired* in a way that sat deeper than a few days of restless sleep.

(He sometimes felt as if he was older than Steve Rogers himself, as if he was more *burned out* than he was able to cure.)

This time the kitchen radio wasn't tuned in on any of the music stations known to Peter, no – its speakers were gently humming with some kind of lofi tunes, this type that could be found on Youtube and titled somewhere along the lines of *chill*. It created a soft domestic atmosphere that could be almost felt with Peter's palms, a foggy one that still felt delicate against the sides of the boy's sleepy mind. It nearly lulled him to sleep right there and then, leaning over the doorway to May's room and observing Quentin's smooth moves while the man stirred something in a pot.

"You say once again that you can't cook and I'll never talk to you again," he mumbled in a low voice, yet still loud enough for Quentin to hear. The latter snapped his head up, his broody face painted with a warm, *warm* smile the moment he noticed Peter.

"I'm not cooking anything new, though. Does this still count?"

"It does," the boy replied, a smile tugging on the corners of his lips. He stepped forward, pulling on the edges of his large white T-shirt absentmindedly, shuffling around a little until he stood in front of the man. Quentin eyed him carefully, his blue eyes darker in the dimly-lit room, but it didn't feel intrusive, didn't feel *too much*. As much as Peter hated being looked at, Quentin's attentive eyes somehow didn't make him want to hide.

"Are you alright?" He asked in that soft, soft tone that caused his voice to sound so harmless, so fucking *innocent*. It almost hurt, but Peter didn't even know *why*.

"I'm good," he replied and honestly, it was true. He felt *good* and it was almost scary, how quickly he was getting used to the feeling. "Nothing happened. Nothing interesting, at least. People were taking photos, like, *a lot*."

Quentin chuckled at that, goddamn *chuckled* like a schoolgirl and Peter had no idea what to do with the fact. "You're like Kardashians, I swear. Every time you go out in your fancy suit, you get a literal photo session."

"*Sessions*, Q, plural. They don't stop on just one," the boy snorted, reaching up to brush his hand against the man's bare arm, feeling its warmth and muscles before leaning over the stove. "I get soup for dinner then?" He asked with a smile, glancing up at the man a second later. Beck's smiled turned coy, turned timid and gentle, and suddenly he looked so much younger that Peter had to swallow down the bump stuck in his throat.

“I just heated up your lunch. Guessed it’d be a shame to let it go to waste it and I can make you some more, *better* one I hope, tomorrow,” he explained, his right hand coming up to scratch at the nape of his neck. He always did that when he was shy, Peter noted, and it looked like a cute habit on him.

He grinned, barely registering the change, and stood on his toes to peck the poor flustered man on the cheek. “Sounds nice, not gonna lie. I’m going to get used to it if you’re not careful enough.”

Quentin laughed at that weakly, his eyes flickering from the pot to Peter and back. He dropped his hand, letting it hover in the air between them for a moment or two – as if he wasn’t sure what to do with it, what he *could* do – before reaching it out to rest it on the boy’s waist.

“Maybe I don’t wanna be careful,” he said in that soft tone, voice low and slightly gruff, baby blue eyes locked with Peter’s dark, dark ones, and something in the boy’s chest squeezed painfully.

It scared him, how fast he was getting used to all those new good things in his life – it scared him how attached he was becoming. It was good to feel alright and it was good to sleep, and God, it was even better not to be alone anymore. It was good to have someone who *cared*, just *cared* without expecting anything in particular from him – without expecting *anything*. It scared him how much he liked this new version of his life.

And it scared him how much he didn’t want it to end.

Chapter End Notes

Also, I can't believe we've reached 6k views.
Thank you all so much!!

won't you stay a while?

Chapter Notes

Alright, folks. I'm writing this to "Hold Me While You Wait", which makes the whole thing even more nostalgic and damn, are those tears?

As you probably noticed, the symbols on this fic changes from "?" to "20", because we're heading to the end, guys! I've been thinking about this fic for a very, very long time and decided that it's the best time to finish it - it just wants to end here, you know? We still have the epilogue, which should come some time soon, but otherwise, that's it! I hope I didn't disappoint you, my friends - and I hope I've caused you all to smile and laugh all along our journey.

And a big thank you - thank you for entering this story and staying here, thank you for ending it with me!

(It's still not the end tho!)

Title from "Hold Me While You Wait" by Lewis Capaldi.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter couldn't acknowledge fully (or even partly, to be honest) how familiar Quentin's warm body felt next to his, laying on the same bed – still May's, because apparently she was too busy to come home, which wasn't new, but neither of them complained – and hidden under the same covers. It wasn't their fiftieth or even tenth night together, no. They were far from there, yet it was already clear for Peter, all clear.

He was going to hurt really bad when the time would come and he'd be alone again.

He tried not to think about it, tried to focus on other things – on the heavy arm resting on his hip, on the strong heartbeat just beneath his ear. Tried to tune in to the steady rhythm of the man's breaths that ruffled his hair and mingled with the air around them. Tried to do whatever he could to distract himself, although he was never good at this kind of things, right?

"Is the time right to talk about it?" Quentin's gruff voice resounded somewhere above Peter's head, forcing the boy to tilt his head to look into the man's eyes. They were dark in the unlit room, pupils blown wide and adjusted to the blackness, searching Peter's face as if looking for something, anything.

"About what?" He asked in a whisper, not wanting to disturb their calmness – a subconscious frown painted his forehead, because God, he'd *miss* him. He already did, even though Quentin wasn't gone yet. *Trying to get used to it*, he thought weakly.

The man's hand pressed gently on Peter's hip, bony and sharp, and moved a bit up to rest on his ribs that the boy just *knew* were sticking out from under his skin more and more with each day.

"About your eating."

Peter sighed, the sound heavy like a brick, the feeling of air sweeping against the bottom of his lungs like a broom pleasant to his fatigued body.

“What about it?” He asked again, louder this time, trying to sound sure and failing. Quentin’s gaze flickered frantically between his eyes, searching, studying, maybe even investigating. The truth was the man was too bright, too smart not to notice the smallest things even Peter didn’t see. It was dangerous, he knew, but in some twisted way the boy was glad.

He was glad there was someone to tell him he wasn’t okay when he tried his best to pretend he was.

“You’re not getting any stronger even though you tried so damn hard to convince me you eat more than you did before.”

“You didn’t believe me anyway,” the boy murmured, his gaze slipping from the man’s face to his neck, then to the washed-out overprint of his T-shirt that depicted a zombie’s head. The creature’s ears were almost completely faded, however its milky eyes still pierced through Peter’s like two sharp knives, the snow-white caption printed below glowing deathly in the dark: *away with you*.

“And it looks like I had my reasons, huh?” Quentin continued, but his voice was still soft, still caring, even though he should’ve been angry by now, right? Angry with Peter, angry with the way he would always lie about himself. He should’ve been and he wasn’t, which was getting weirder and weirder with each day.

Seriously, where did his patience come from?

“I *am* eating more, okay?” He *wasn’t*, God help him, but the truth was too hard to spit out, too hard to tell.

The only thing he was hearing for a long time was a heavy, heavy sigh that lasted forever. “Are you?”

He didn’t reply, which was an answer enough for the man; the big, bearish but gentle palm lifted from his ribs and he wanted to grab it, to put it back, but before he could panic, it was back. This time it laid on his cheekbone, tilting his head slightly so the boy’s stare fell back on Quentin’s eyes.

“I’m not trying to argue, Peter. I’m not trying to blame you. That’s okay if you’re not eating more, but don’t lie to me, alright?” He asked – more said, confident but timid, steady but soft – and it hurt to look into those eyes and not see Mysterio anymore, because Mysterio was familiar, right? He was evil, but familiar. Solid.

And it would’ve been easier to argue if there was still Mysterio there – it would’ve been easier to lie.

But there was no Mysterio – there was Quentin Beck. And this Quentin Beck – *his* Quentin Beck – he wasn’t evil. And it was making things even more complicated than before.

“Alright,” he replied like a scolded child, wanting to duck his head, to shy away, but the hand on his cheek didn’t let him. It held him, stable and sure, and Peter felt his insides tighten at the sight of this easy, easy smile on Quentin’s lips, a smile that reached his eyes and accentuated his wrinkles.

“Good,” he whispered and brushed a thumb across Peter’s lower lip, lingering on one of their corners and swiping back. “I might have an idea that you may not exactly love, but it’s a good one.”

Peter snorted at that, not noting the way Quentin's eyes softened even more at the sound. "A good one? You so sure?"

"I am. I'm always right," the man winked and it was a good thing his sight wasn't even half as flawless as Peter's, because the stupid gesture made a blush bloom on his cheeks and nose like a spring rose.

"Alright, then give me that idea," Peter said and rolled his eyes in a dramatic way, moving a hand from the man's abdomen – right above his wound, right above the stitches that were the only thing holding Quentin's meat in one piece – to rest it on his chest. It made it easier for him to prop himself up a little, to lock his eyes with Beck's better.

The latter cleared his throat quietly, theatrically, checking with one eye to see if it was making Peter smile; it was. "I have an idea," he started a second later, "that I could make you some food for you to take to school. I am not the best mom ever, but even *I* could make a sandwich, right?"

Peter was speechless for a moment, maybe two. "You're like, for real now?"

"For realsies," Quentin winked again and God, the blush deepened by at least two shades. *Embarrassing*. "And besides, I'll have plenty of time to practice my Gordon Ramsay skills."

This thing again, the *time* – it was making Peter dizzy, making him sick and ill, making his lungs shrink and stomach do a flip. It was hell to think about, because God, they didn't have that much time, despite everything Quentin would say – because he would leave, wouldn't he? He would heal and then leave, take everything good away, take the smiles and the warmth and the safety, he would take it and leave.

Because there was nothing to keep him here, right? There was nothing Peter could give him except his own tears and panic attacks and issues, nothing except pain and sadness and Peter didn't want it for him. It was selfish to want *him* here, but the boy knew he couldn't just spare him his own burdens.

And so he shouldn't want him here. He shouldn't, God, but he *did*.

"Everything's good?" The man asked somewhere in the middle of Peter's panicked musing, his voice distant and echoing, and the boy instantly knew that yet another attack was coming. Great.

Just great.

"No," he admitted and swallowed a bump stuck in his throat, and it *hurt*, it hurt and it was starting to be too much, but he had to hold on. To keep going. "I'm not good."

He could already tell that the man noticed as well – of course he did. He felt himself sit up, guided by big and strong hands like he weighed nothing, felt himself lean on the broad frame in front of him. His lungs were starting to feel too small, too tight, his heart too slow for the drowning amounts of his blood, and it *hurt* so much he couldn't think.

Why did it always end like this? Why couldn't he be *normal*, just like the rest of them?

"You'll leave," he spit out, fighting against the dry heaving that was shaking through his body, making his limbs tremble feverly. "You'll leave, because you'll be better off without me, because I'm fucked up and I know it, but I don't want it. I know that I shouldn't, because I'll only slow you

down, but I don't want you to leave, but you will anyway and I don't know what to do. I don't know how to make you stay, because I want you to stay so *bad* it's been killing me, but I can't—"

A breath, finally, shallow and shaky, but a breath that let him say the last thing he wanted, the last thing he *had* to say.

"I can't be a burden to yet another person."

Silence. It killed him, each second murdering a cell after a cell in his body, slaughtering them, leaving only a bloody trail. He shook with force, tried to focus on the warm body next to him, because it was the last time it would be here, the last time he wouldn't be *alone*, and he tried to breathe, he tried so hard, but he was already *alone*, and he couldn't do this *alone* anymore, not now that he knew what it felt like not to be *alone* with everything, and God, he couldn't—

"I have no idea who told you that, but I'm not leaving. I'm *not* leaving, Peter, because that was never an option for me."

Silence once again, a beat or two, or even three. Peter's breath hitched in his throat and for a second he thought he was going to pass out, because God, *he was so low on oxygen*, but then everything seemed to have unlocked and he could *breathe* and the air had never tasted so *sweet* and *delicious* and—

"I can't tell you that I love you. Not *yet*, because I don't wanna lie to you, but— But I think I could love you. I think I *will*, if you let me."

He didn't notice he was crying until his nose was so clogged he had to open his mouth to catch his breath, and he didn't even have time to hate himself for that, because two strong, muscular arms radiating warmth wrapped his lithe torso in an embrace.

And it was okay, immediately, it was warm and cozy and okay, and he blinked his wet eyes and leaned his forehead over Quentin's shoulder and sighed.

The room was silent for a minute or so after, the sounds of their breaths bouncing on and off the walls, echoing, Quentin's heartbeat fast but steady under Peter's ear. Familiar.

"Will you say something, Peter? I'm worried."

"I'm sorry."

"Did I scare you?"

Peter snorted at that and he didn't even know *why*, because it wasn't any funny, it wasn't even partly amusing, but it was so absurd he couldn't find his words for a second. "You didn't."

And then, "You don't scare me."

He pushed himself away, leaned back to look into the man's eyes, leaving only a thin barrier of air between them, so thin their mouths were nearly touching when he spoke. "But you didn't have to say that, you know? You don't have to make things up to calm me down."

Quentin looked a bit hurt at that – slightly more than a bit – and the boy *almost* felt guilty, almost apologized for speaking at *all*, because it never did him any good, but before he could muster

anything, the man was faster.

“I didn’t make things up. I haven’t done that since Europe, Peter. You have to believe me.”

I do.

A sigh. “I *am* sorry for Europe. I know that it fucked up literally every good reason for you to be with me ‘cause I was— I *am* a dick, still, and I just— I really can’t think of any decent *and* rational argument for why you’d want to be with me, but here you are. I guess.”

“I could say the same thing, you know?” Peter murmured at that, his eyes never leaving Quentin’s, although it was starting to be too much – too much raw emotion, too much sincerity. Too much shit that Peter had been scared of for *days*.

“But you’re not a dick anymore, Q,” he breathed out weakly, his throat tightening, stopping him from forming more clear words, but he *had to* before Quentin took it the wrong way. “If somebody asked me a week ago if I wanted to be with *you* or anyone else, I’d say no.” A breath, deep, deep and long. “But it changed. And I want to give it a chance.”

Quentin’s eyes softened at that, the corners of his lips quirking up in an almost sad way, and Peter was too slow with his question before the man spoke. “And *that* is why I think no one really deserves you. I can pretend I do, but nobody does, Peter.”

“And what kind of bullshit is this?” The boy asked at that, scoffed, nearly, and Quentin laughed lowly under his breath as if he wasn’t allowed to, but *wanted*.

“You give people too many chances.”

“You better stop talking like that before I’ll change my mind,” he joked in hope of getting the other to laugh, in hope of getting to hear that happy, amused sound again, because *God*, he liked it.

He liked *him*.

To his contentment, Quentin huffed a short laugh at that, barely a breath, but it *was* there and it was enough. He was always enough for him.

Even more so than enough.

“I definitely could love you, you little shit,” the man spoke in a hushed tone, but aloud, his voice carrying so much gentleness that Peter almost missed the last part of the sentence. He frowned and opened his mouth, more for the drama than anything else.

“You know that I could easily break your neck even if you fought back?” He asked, feeling a little more smug than he should, but the satisfaction was wiped out from his chest as soon as Quentin opened his mouth.

“And *that* is kinda hot.”

A wink. A goddamn, bloody wink, as if Peter was some easy chick and Quentin was a loverboy – which he probably was, to be honest, judging by the way his eyes lit up, sparks dancing in his irises like stars in the night sky, everything just at the simple sight of the boy blushing all across his cheeks and nose, and his neck as well.

And it was *warm*, all over his skin and his chest, tingling and twisting, and he just let himself fall back on the bed, tucking himself under the covers with his back to the man.

“I’m going to sleep,” he announced in a strained voice, strained and embarrassed, because he could feel the nape of his neck growing hotter and hotter with each second, visibly red like a tomato. His statement was met with nothing more than a quiet laugh – more like a *giggle* – and then the arms were back all around him, a broad chest pressing against his back and long legs supporting his own.

He snuggled closer, wiggling like a fish on the ground, closer to the *warmth* and *safety*, and sighed when hot lips pressed against his clothed shoulder.

“Goodnight then,” he heard right next to his ear, Quentin’s voice already rough from the sleepiness and his breath hot against the skin of his scalp. He could swear he felt the man’s mouth move slightly, as if he wanted to say something *more*, but no sound came out and he didn’t push.

Didn’t press, because they didn’t do that. They *never* pressed.

But he had to say something, because it just felt right. He had to say it out loud, had to let the other man *know*, because he *deserved* it and he wanted to let him know, just in case.

“Quentin?” He started in a soft, soft whisper. There was no response for solid ten seconds, but he was patient. At least learning to, for the other’s sake.

“Yeah?” A slurred word, the voice tired and barely-there, yet it *was* there. He heard him.

“*I could love you too.*”

Nothing except a short hum in response, a hum and a peck on the back of his neck, but it was okay. It *felt* okay, it felt right and in place, and–

He could get used to this, to more of this.

And he *would*.

The next morning came with lightness that Peter had never felt before, had never *expected* to feel – it was new, new and good, settling in his chest like a long-haired kitten, purring and scratching with its claws in a way that made his insides tingle. He felt *good* again, for yet another time in that short period, although it was *not* new.

What was new though was hope that bloomed in his chest, *hope* that made everything slightly more bearable.

(Alright, maybe a bit more than just *slightly*.)

When he stumbled out of May’s room, still wearing his night clothes, still rubbing his eyes with his fists to get rid of the drowsiness, he was met with the sight of Quentin hunched over the counter, two steaming mugs resting beside his hands and... a loaf of bread?

“What the hell are you doing up this early?” He asked in that horse voice than scraped the walls of his throat, coming to stand next to the man, leaning slightly so their shoulders touched. Only now did he notice that the counter was covered in more than just some bread – there were tomatoes, a lonely cucumber and a few leaves of lettuce.

Confusing.

“I’m making you sandwiches,” the man replied in a light tone, equally as light as Peter felt and the realization made his heart swell. “You didn’t even say good morning, by the way. How *rude*. ”

The boy smirked at that, the smile coming nice and easy, the chaste kiss shared between them quick. He shook his head and peered into the mugs, not exactly sure what else he could do.

“Is this tea?” He asked *oh* so eloquently and given only a nod in response he took one of them in his hands, wrapping his fingers around the thick red ceramics and bringing it to the centre of his chest to get rid of the morning coldness. His gaze jumped between the ingredients laid out all around Quentin’s palms, scanning and searching and checking, this weird feeling twisting his gut uncomfortably.

But he *had to* eat; there was no other way to get healthier and stronger again than to eat. Besides, Tony would be so angry if he saw Peter in his current state. Oh, so angry.

“Thought I’d do the basic ones,” Quentin spoke out at last, tearing Peter away from his disarrayed thoughts. He seemed pensive to the boy, thinking something over and over, apparently weighing the options, and Peter wouldn’t be surprised if he really *did* think about the boy’s lunch this much. “There’s cheese, lettuce, some slices of cucumbers and tomatoes as well. I was thinking about tuna, but I don’t trust myself enough yet not to fuck it up.”

“I don’t really like tuna,” Peter admitted and relished in the brightness of Quentin’s smile that bloomed at his statement.

“Well, good for me. You like salmon?”

“Haven’t eaten it in years, but I think I still do.”

They fell into a beat of silence, comfortable this time, the lively sounds of awakening Queens seeping through the half-open windows and their breaths mingling above the counter, Peter’s hip leaning on its cold wood. At some point a quiet humming resounded in the room, quiet but steady, sounding a little bit too close to another Lady Gaga song, and the sheer realization made the boy smile.

God, it was so ridiculous. So...

Domestic.

“Quentin?” He muttered before taking a short sip of his tea; it was still hot, but not scalding, a tad too weak, but brewing was nothing difficult to learn. Quentin would manage.

“Yeah?” The man hummed, the melody breaking in half. Peter almost regretted saying anything, but then the humming was back, the unfamiliar song echoing slightly in Beck’s rough, throaty voice. The boy would never admit it, but damn, Quentin had some nice vocal chords.

He breathed in the scent of his drink, still strong enough to be pleasant, tickling his nostrils in this funny, funny way.

“Do you think you could make me more soup today?”

The question fell between them, and fell and fell and fell, and for a moment Peter thought that he wasn’t going to get an answer; that the question was too childish, too pathetic. He tried not to curl in himself, not to squirm away from the man, yet he didn’t have to.

The smile that adorned Quentin’s features was almost too much for Peter to bear. Too happy. Too *good*.

““Course I can,” was the reply, simple but kind, short but warm. Peter looked up just in time to see the man’s eyes flicker to his face for a second. “Anything for you, darling.”

Darling. He didn’t think he could take more of this for now, more of this sincerity and gentleness, and *care*, so much care it hurt, but—

He didn’t have to limit himself, not anymore. And he would never have to, right?

Not ever.

Chapter End Notes

And guys, don't forget - we still have our mini series to come!!!

epilogue

Chapter Notes

Alright, my dudes. I've just finished the one and only, the epilogue to CYBTOTC (it's all [HER](#) fault!) and decided: fuck it. No proofreading for ten times because I wanna give you an early New Year's Eve present.

The thing is, I started writing this story in March this year, just after Corona made herself famous all around the world, and it carried me through those really, *really* hard times. And I wanted to end this year, a very difficult and *hopefully* never repeating year, with this story as well. Hoping you feel the same way.

So here we are, and I want to thank you, every single one of you that has opened this story at least once - thank you. It's been the best writing adventure of my life, and that's only thanks to you.

And my sweetest girl [flares 09](#). It all wouldn't be possible without her. The biggest thank you, t'hy'la. I love you to the moon (and all the planets in the Solar System) and back! (づ｡•̣̣̣•̣̣̣｡)づ

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

First thing that happened was May's moving out.

The thing was Peter had never expected the day that May would eventually move out of their little cozy flat. Of course, he'd known that it would happen, sooner or later, because let's be honest – she was head over heels in love with Happy and seemed, well, *happy* around him. It would be only natural that she'd make the move and started her own life, not tied to her nephew the same way as before.

Still, it was quite a surprise when her things started to disappear from the shelves in the living room; when one day her spacious wooden wardrobe turned out to be empty, ready to be filled again with Peter and Quentin's clothes; when the rows of psychology books vanished from their bookcase, leaving a hole that looked a little bit too sad for the boy's liking.

Moving out was a process, long and tiring, and it took two weeks and four pairs of hands, yet in the end Peter couldn't even hide his surprise and even *sadness* when he opened the front door of their apartment on the last day.

"I can't believe she's gone," he exclaimed weakly, forcing his frozen in place legs to move and cross the threshold. He heard the door close behind himself, the lock jumping in place. Quentin slipped off his heavy boots and shrugged his coat off, and all the while Peter was standing there, like a deer in the headlights, gaze running around the flat frantically.

"She's not *gone* gone, Peter," Quentin said, so softly that Peter's heart still ached at the sound. "She now lives barely what, twenty minutes from here? Make it three for Spider-Man."

Peter couldn't hide the huff of laughter that escaped his throat. He shook his head, breaking out of the trance, and tugged the sleeves of his thick jacket off. "Yeah, but you know what I mean."

He heard the man sigh at that, making the boy look up. Quentin's hair was a bit shorter now, cut precisely by a hairdresser and styled with Peter's paste, while his beard stayed as short as possible, framing his sharp jaw and making it look a little softer than it really was. His eyes were dark blue in the dim lightning and somehow the whole sight made Peter feel *at home*, despite everything else.

"I know, but she didn't move out to Europe. She's still here, in New York, and she could be here in minutes, if you called her," the man replied, voice even softer now, his arms coming to wrap themselves around Peter's middle and pressing the boy against his broad warm chest. "I know it feels scary for you, but she didn't abandon you. She would never."

"I know," Peter mumbled, hiding his face in Quentin's sweater, nose finding a spot that smelled like the man the most. "I know, I know. I feel like a baby, wailing and moping around because my Aunt found herself a boyfriend."

"Well, you *are* a baby," Quentin huffed and before Peter could make a touch of drama out of that, the man continued, "but you can focus on other things than your Aunt not living with you anymore. For example, you can visit her from time to time, which gives you a nice destination for your patrols. *Or*," Quentin broke off for a second, a sly smile finding its way onto his lips, "you could focus on the fact that now we can have our little dates here and not worry about May coming in any second."

Peter rolled his eyes at that; he was getting quite used to Quentin being, well, *this way*. "She could still come in any second. We swapped the spare keys, remember?"

It was Quentin's turn to roll his eyes and he did with such a force that even Peter felt the bland pain behind his own. He grinned, already knowing the drama was coming. "You're always ruining the fun, I can't believe this! *I* am supposed to be the one doing this, I'm older!"

"But you're the one acting like a highschooler, not me."

Quentin huffed at that, puffing out his chest so hard that Peter had to lean back, and looked at the boy with the most offence he could muster. Peter laughed at the sight, so loud and so happy that he knew the man couldn't stay angry even if he wanted.

The truth was, Peter could always buy him with signs of happiness.

And just as expected, he did; Quentin sighed with defeat at that. "Alright, I'm making dinner."

The fact that it was chicken soup made it all way better.

Second thing that happened was Pepper reaching out to him, calling him halfway through December, just before the last Christmas preparations would take the world by storm.

It was a surprise, but not a bad one – a really, *really* good one that made Peter feel as if the Christmas came earlier this year only for him. She called him when he was walking home from school, all wrapped in a thick scarf and a beanie, and woolen gloves that made it hell to accept the call from the unknown number. Finally, he pressed his frozen finger to the green spot on his phone

screen, put the device next to his ear and breathed a weak *hello?*.

It was a roller coaster of feelings from there, starting with shock and ending with joy, or rather a warm, warm sensation in his chest; warm like a mug of hot chocolate and warming him up the same way. Pepper's voice sounded robotic through the line, but also apologetic; although she hadn't said a word apologizing for the long, long period of not contacting him, he knew it was all about it. He knew she meant it.

It wasn't her fault that she hadn't been able to hear or see him sooner; it wasn't her fault, really. She deserved all the time in the world to mourn, and so did he.

They talked for a while, not long and not briefly, however Peter didn't know how to measure that for them anymore. They weren't exactly close – the person connecting them was gone, and so was their idea of how to treat each other. They talked and talked, asking questions and getting answers, and somewhere along the conversation Pepper mentioned that Morgan missed him.

Peter's eyebrows shot up at that with surprise. "She does?"

"Yeah," the woman confirmed, her voice gentle and broken, still, despite the strength she had. "She keeps asking me when she could see you."

"I had no idea she remembered me."

"Oh, she does. She's heard all the stories about you throughout the years."

And wow, that was new. He knew what she meant by this – he knew that it was *Tony* to tell her those stories, but he'd had no idea before. He'd had no idea Tony had considered him *this* important.

The realization made his throat clench uncomfortably. He came to a halt in the middle of the pavement, too taken aback to continue walking. "Then... Then I– I would like to see her, too."

And *damn* if his voice sounded as broken as hers. He could swear he heard a sound coming from the other side of the line, wet and horribly too close to a sob, but he would never say that this sound fit the Pepper Stark he knew. He'd seen her cry only *once*.

It was awfully unlike her.

In the end, they didn't agree on any date. Peter felt that they weren't ready yet; they weren't ready to face each other and see the reminders, to remember; they weren't ready to stop mourning. It would take them much, much longer than that.

And it was okay. They had all the time in the world.

They said a quick goodbye and the line cut short, the dull sound waking Peter up from his trance. He continued his way back home, back to the cozy flat and a bowl of soup, and warm arms that he cried into for the rest of the afternoon.

Nobody had to know.

Third thing that happened was actually two things happening at once.

It was somewhere days after Pepper's call that he found out and God, it was like another early Christmas gift. He was with Quentin then, both of them moving through the store's aisles, the man pushing their cart and humming to the Britney Spears' song echoing from the speakers, and Peter walking just beside him. He was leafing through the list of products they needed for Christmas, the list they both prepared a day earlier while cuddling in their shared bed like an old married couple, and sighing every time before taking something from the shelves.

It would cost them a *lot*. And since Quentin had been through barely a month of internship in his brand new job, it would be an especially sharp stab in their account.

He was looking for the freshest oranges in the fruit stall when his phone buzzed like crazy. *Twice*.

"What the hell," he mumbled under his breath, gaining a questioning look from Quentin. He shrugged and reached for his pocket, pulling out his phone.

And oh, *fuck*. He hadn't expected what he saw. (But he should have, right?)

The picture he got was slightly blurred, because Ned could never take a steady photo. His hands were shaking like crazy all the time, and yet it was clear *enough* that Peter understood.

He could see Ned in the foreground, his goofy smile and Betty's hands wrapped around the boy's neck. Her lips were pressed to Ned's flushed cheek, both of them wearing matching Christmas sweaters and sitting in the coffee shop the four of them loved with all their hearts.

But what was even better was that they weren't alone.

The background was even more blurred than Ned and Betty, yet Peter could clearly see Maggie kissing no one other than their precious little badass named MJ. A badass that always told him she didn't believe in love because it was overrated.

Overrated his ass.

The picture was signed with a message that said *Double date: check, triple date still to come* and all Peter could do when Quentin asked him what he'd got was to stuff his phone in the man's face and watch the shock paint all over his face as well.

"I thought MJ didn't do romance?" He said, or more likely asked, when the initial blow passed. His features were still frozen over the device held in his left hand and Peter couldn't hide the laugh that the sight brought out of him.

"Apparently she does now. People change," he summed it up and got a horrified glance from the man. "What?"

"Don't tell me I'll have to spend a few hours with MJ in the same room."

And God, it would never stop to be funny, how MJ and Quentin still couldn't find the right way to communicate, mostly because his friend was too stubborn and his boyfriend too scared of her.

He couldn't wait for their triple date.

Fourth thing to happen, and the last one at that, was certainly a Christmas gift.

It was the 24th day of December, the last day of preparations and the first day free from school which allowed Peter to sleep in this morning. Quentin was still fast asleep next to him when he woke up eventually, the man's long, muscular arms wrapped around Peter, making him feel like in a safe cocoon. His breath was steady, heartbeat calm, and the boy sighed with contentment, knowing it was all okay and Quentin's sleep was the way it should be.

Thank The Spider for his enhanced hearing.

The electronic clock standing on the nightstand was blinking with a weak red light, telling him that he still had over twenty minutes before he should be getting up to do something. It was a long time, still, and he stretched slightly before carefully reaching out to the nightstand, grabbing the glasses with a sleepy movement.

He'd stopped hiding away E.D.I.T.H. some time ago, *a long time*, trusting Quentin enough not to stress about it.

Trusting him with all he had, to be honest.

He unfolded them cautiously, attentively, before putting them on his nose to check the news. He'd started to do this in the morning a month ago or so, and soon it had become a part of his morning routine. It was an easier, more convenient way of checking global and Queens news, of checking the condition of his suit and looking through his mail in search of something official.

As usual, there was nothing extraordinary. Except a message from E.D.I.T.H. herself, titled *merry christmas*.

Huh?

He opened it with furrowed eyebrows, and saw, well. Nothing. There were no contents in the message, no text except for the *very* general title, and he was just going to close the window with disappointment when an attachment caught his eyes. It was titled the same way as the message itself, *merry christmas*, and it was a video file.

(If he'd known what it was earlier, he wasn't sure if he would've opened it.)

The surface of the glasses glimmered for a split of a second when he decided to open it spontaneously. Their room darkened and then brightened in Peter's vision, the sound in his eyes slightly buzzing like an error notification, and then it all calmed down.

Tony was sitting in May's purple armchair in the corner.

The man's eyes were focused precisely on the boy, as if he'd known all this time ago where Peter would be this morning. He was leaning on the back of the chair, one leg propped on the other, and clasped hands resting over his dark pants clad thigh.

And he looked so *real*.

“Good morning, Peter,” the hologram said, his voice smooth in the boy’s ears. Tony’s eyes were sharp, his thick glasses nowhere to be found, and they shone brightly even in the video. “I guess you didn’t expect to get this message. *And* to see me again. And here I am.”

He smiled in the end, kind of sadly, and Peter felt sudden prickling in the back of his eyes.

He wanted to hug Tony *so bad*.

“There’s a lot going on lately. We’re working on getting you all back, with this Ant-Man guy’s help. It’s a mess. Pepper’s angry at me, Morgan’s sad, and I know how it will all end.”

Tony unclasped his hands, lifting one of them to rub at his forehead. He looked so tired and *old*, and Peter wasn’t sure if it was how he remembered him.

“I’ve already recorded one video. For Morgan. But knowing when this one will be sent to you, you’ve already seen it. Not once, I guess, though I’m not sure if Pepper would want to scratch on fresh wounds. Anyway, we’re almost done with the plan that looks more like a madman’s idea, and I thought that you deserve your own recording. Of course you do, Peter.”

He stood up, slower than over five years ago that Peter remembered him from, his bones apparently having aged a lot through this time.

“I hope we will get you all back. I’m positively sure we will. And I hope you will find your place then, reunite with your Aunt and all this. Doesn’t matter. I hope you will be happy, Peter.”

He started pacing now, hands in his pockets, gaze still locked on Peter. It caused goose-flesh on the boy’s back, his spine feeling colder than usually.

“I hope you will be happy, kid. That’s all that matters. No matter where, no matter with whom, all that matters is that you find happiness,” Tony cut himself short and came to a halt in front of Peter and Quentin’s bed. His eyes were attentive, as always, but softer than normally as well, and Peter didn’t even try to hold back the wave of sadness that overwhelmed him.

Tony’s eyes hardened for a second or two, his lips tightened before the man let it all loosen up again.

He leaned over slightly. “There’s one thing I’ve never told you, but I should’ve. A long time ago.”

(Tony smiled at last, this melancholic kind of smile of his, and Peter *missed him* so bad.)

“I’ve always known you were better than me. Very similar to the young Tony Stark from years ago, but better. Not bitter and overambitious. Not making the mistakes I’ve made. There’s nothing you should ever change in yourself, but you need to *let it go*,” Tony straightened up again, his hands digging deeper into the bottoms of his pockets. Peter swallowed down the gulp in his throat. “Let it go and *live* instead of being stuck in this never-ending loop of self-guiling because you don’t feel like you’re enough. Trust me, no one can get you out of this hole. Except *you*.”

The hologram wavered dangerously, flickered, glitched, and Tony sent him one last smile before the recording stopped.

And Peter felt so, so *empty* for a moment before Quentin moved next to him.

“What’s going on, babe?” The man mumbled sleepily, his eyes barely opened enough to see, but Peter saw the worry in them. It took him all he had to take the glasses off and put them back on the nightstand, pushing as far as he could, before diving back into Quentin’s arms.

It was warm there, his nose pressed hard against the man’s collarbone, Quentin’s smell strong and calming. He reached out with his enhanced hearing, tracking the man’s heartbeat like his own lo-fi playlist on Spotify, and placed a small kiss on Quentin’s tanned skin, just above his heart.

And this was his definition of safety; his definition of *happiness*, and he wouldn’t want it any other way.

He wouldn’t want *him* any other way.

“I love you,” he mustered out, the words coming out slow and easy, and *oh*, so this was the right time.

This was how it felt.

Quentin huffed a sleepy laugh at that, this gentle laugh of his, and tightened the embrace.

“I love you, too.”

And Peter still missed Tony so bad it hurt, but it was okay. It was okay, because Tony was proud of him and he would always be.

(*And Quentin loved him.*)



Chapter End Notes

The lovely art piece you see at the end is the work of [vforvictory24](#) on tumblr! Let's appreciate them because they're real talented!

[HERE](#) you can listen to the playlist my big sis made for this fic!
See you soon, guys! And Happy New Year to y'all!

End Notes

come yell at me at tumblr [@winchester-burger](#) or [@hear-my-barbaric-yawp](#)

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!